

**A CRITIQUE OF THE LOGIC OF CONSUMPTION  
IN POSTMODERN ARCHITECTURE:**

**THE MUSEUM AS A CASE STUDY**

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## **A Critique of The Logic of Consumption in Postmodern Architecture: The Museum as a Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

In constructing a distinctive polemic, postmodern architecture presented itself as a reaction to the modern movement, embodying both its negation and transcendence. In the ongoing debate over the definition of postmodernity as a cultural condition, the position of negation continues to come under severe criticism.

This thesis attempts to understand constituents of the ideological discourse of postmodern architecture, approaching it from a perspective free from the notion of negation to modernism. Despite the atmosphere of difference that characterizes the contemporary debate over the definition of the postmodern condition, there is shared agreement on the primacy of Late Capitalist ideology in the formation of this condition, leading to a definition of postmodern culture as the 'consumer culture.' The writings of the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard present an analysis of the nature of consumption in this emerging cultural condition, claiming it as the "main climater of life and social relations." Building on the premise that architectural production is representative of the cultural discourse in which it is conceived, we will attempt to examine the influence of the logic of consumption on the architectural production of societies living in the postmodern condition under late, or monopoly capitalism. In so doing we will focus on the museum as an architectural type. Museums enjoy a significant potential for cultural representation. It is believed therefore that they are particularly sensitive to ideological changes in cultural conditions.

As there can be no definitive understanding of Postmodernism while it is still in the making, the study will follow an operative rather than a historical model of criticism.

Thesis Supervisor : Stanford Anderson  
Title: Professor of History and Architecture

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**Introduction.**



Seeking a distinctive polemic, the promoters of the historical project of postmodern architecture presented their work as a reactionary to the modern movement, embodying both its negation and transcendence. Noting the 'inevitable' destiny of the collapse of the "modern,"<sup>1</sup> Paolo Portoghesi cheered Charles Jenck's lucidity in declaring its death:

"With lucid irony he [Jencks] pinpoints the exact date for the death of Modern Architecture: he has it coincide -at 3:32 PM, July 15, 1972- with the dynamiting of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project."<sup>2</sup>

Under the growing influence of such epistemological discourses as Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction, the earlier paradigm of negation, continues to come under severe criticism. The paradigm of negation, as elaborated by Jencks, embodies three premises: The first is the proposition to understand history as composed of independent autonomous periods separated by radical breaks. The second is the proposition to view each of those periods as holistic and homogeneous in nature. The third is an understanding of modern architecture as a monolithic project governed by scientific rationalism and functional determinism.

The current discourse in architectural historiography provides arguments which falsify these naive propositions. Historical periodization is debated as, itself, a convention which, while useful as an operative mechanism, must not be turned into a form of dogmatic determinism<sup>3</sup>. Historical periods are arbitrary

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<sup>1</sup> Portoghesi defines the 'Modern' as that repertory of forms which, after a creative incubation during the early decades of this century, took shape in Europe and America during the 1930s and spread rapidly throughout the world.

<sup>2</sup> P.Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), p.27.

<sup>3</sup> Stanford Anderson argues that: "Although conventions have a certain autonomy and shape our thoughts and actions, it is important not to drive

constructs which, in their very nature, privilege particular components of the context being studied. Jameson argues that "radical breaks between periods do not involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuring of a certain number of elements already given."<sup>4</sup>

The proposition to understand historical periods as holistic and homogeneous in nature comes under severe criticism from the post-structuralists. Cultural systems, can be explained less as temporal *processes* than as spatial structures. The cultural meanings of a period are interrelated. The meaning of any single component depends on the existence of all the other components. Architectural history is understood not as a process in which each phase negates a previous one, "but as a series of traces that survive in current ways of looking at the world." "A historical form can therefore be seen as raw material *within* the present practice of architecture- not as something that has been relegated to an external past."<sup>5</sup> Stanford Anderson presents an articulate argument explaining the nature of such a history. While accepting the usefulness of the linear synchronic approach, he nevertheless, warns against mistaking it for the totality of history which, he argues, is "multilineal" and "nonholistic" in nature:

"For any task, it is necessary to locate ourselves and our actions within a cultural field. These distinctions [particular to the cultural field and the aim of the study in question] could be significantly analyzed in synchronic

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the notion of convention into another form of determinism. Conventions are tested and changed both in their relations with other elements of cultural systems and in their confrontation with empirical constraints."

S. Anderson, "Types and Conventions in Time: Toward a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," *Perspecta*, (1982): 108-117.

<sup>4</sup> F. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, (Washington: Bay Press, 1983): 111-126.

<sup>5</sup> A. Colquhoun, "Postmodernism and Structuralism: A retrospective Glance," *Modernity and The Classical Tradition*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989): 243-255.



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studies. However, in thus locating ourselves in a cultural field, we place ourselves not only in a synchronic problem situation, but also in one or more of an indefinite number of historical lines: a multilineal history. . . A multilineal history with its nonholistic character, recognizes conflict/inconsistencies/contradictions within a cultural setting; thus the need to act critically."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, a careful reading of modern architecture, free from notions of naive determinism with which postmodernists conveniently painted it, will reveal that "modern architecture was not monolithic."<sup>7</sup> It included a variety of subsystems which exhibited varying degrees of assimilability under changing conditions. In so doing, it was sensitive to the variety of "regional and temporal subsets of [such] modern conventional systems."<sup>8</sup>

Faced with the dismantling of their premises, the 'reactionary postmodernists'<sup>9</sup> retreated from their initial problematic position to a new, but by no means less problematic one. Jencks recapitulates: "The announcement of death is, until the other modernists disappear, premature."<sup>10</sup>

By limiting the totality of their discourse to the paradigm of the negation of modern architecture, 'the reactionary postmodernists' presented us with a synchronic as well as a partial historical discourse. While this position may reveal particular characteristics of postmodern architecture,

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<sup>6</sup> S. Anderson, "Critical Conventionalism: The History of Architecture," *Midgard*, vol.1, no.1 ( 1987 ): 33-47.

<sup>7</sup> S. Anderson, "Types and Conventions. . .," p.109.

<sup>8</sup> S. Anderson, "Types and Conventions. . .," p.109.

<sup>9</sup> I use this term to refer to critics, architects, and theoreticians who promote postmodernism as a reactionary negation of modernism.

<sup>10</sup> C. Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism*, ( New York: St. Martin's Press), 10.

nevertheless a number of potential issues are not addressed. Needless to say, the questionable credibility of the paradigm of negation renders the value of the historical project built upon it questionable.

I propose to approach postmodern architecture from a perspective free from the considerations of linear history. Instead of attempting to formulate an understanding of postmodern architecture on the basis of its relation to the architecture of the modern movement, I propose to study it in relation to the 'postmodern' cultural context.

By so arguing, I am operating on two premises: The first is that architectural form is affected by the characteristics of the cultural system in which it is produced. The second is that it is credible to accept the presence of a postmodern cultural condition which exhibits distinctive characteristics. I will attempt to support these two premises.

#### *Artifacts and Cultural systems*

"Any architectural inquiry is not only an account of remarkable diversity, or resilience, historically revealed, but also an account of the potential supports and constraints that any physical environment presents."<sup>11</sup> The issue of the relationship between architectural artifacts and the cultural system has been addressed through numerous hypotheses. The position assumed in this study conforms to Stanford Anderson's thesis of the "quasi-autonomy" of the architectural artifact. In his article "Critical Conventionalism: The History of Architecture,"<sup>12</sup> he argues that: "Rarely does any built work achieve, or achieve only, that which was intended." He goes on to add: "As an environment is

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<sup>11</sup> Stanford Anderson, "Critical Conventionalism: The History of Architecture," in *Midgard*, Vol.1, no.1, (1987): 33-47.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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not fully bound to the intentions that brought it into being, and as it serves differently over time it displays a degree of autonomy."<sup>13</sup> This autonomy is nevertheless not absolute as: "Forms, while neither fully determined nor determining, are both embedded in cultural systems and related to material conditions."<sup>14</sup> The interpretation of the relationship between the artifact and the cultural system in which it is embedded is inseparable from . . . our theories of culture, of time, and of interpretation itself."<sup>15</sup> As there can be no ideal non-distorted model of reality by which we can enter into historical inquiries, such inquiry can therefore; "only begin with something more fallible: a thesis, a historical program, an ideology."<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the artifact and the cultural system is defined in view of the ideology assumed in the historical inquiry, of which the historian must be aware.

In an effort to define a critical field of manageable complexity, the scope of this inquiry will be limited to one type of architectural artifact; the museum. The choice of this type as the subject of study is based on its inexhaustible capacity for cultural representation. Indeed, through their rather short history as a defined type, museums came to be considered the most prestigious monuments of cultural representation, designed to impress upon their visitors society's most revered beliefs and values. So much so, that it came to be argued that:

" If the pursuit of culture has replaced the observance of religion, then the museum may be considered to have taken the place of the cathedral in the modern heart."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Stanford Anderson, "Types and Conventions in Time: Towards a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," *Perspecta*, (1982 ): 108-117.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> S.Anderson, "Critical Conventionalism. . ."

<sup>17</sup> Emanuela Magnusson, "Museum Architecture: the contemporary debate," *Architectural Design*, no.56,( Dec. 1986 ): 36-40.

If one accepts the argument that museum architecture plays as great a role in discussions within the architectural discipline as it does within the "cultural politics of the industrialized world", then the exponential growth in the number of museums erected over the last three decades is a phenomenon rich with signification.

### *Postmodernism*

Is postmodernism a distinct cultural system?

The main challenge facing postmodernism is the skepticism in accepting it as a distinctive cultural condition. This skepticism originates from the belief that postmodernism is but a stage in the very modernist project from which it seeks to distinguish itself. In his *Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard presents an argument representative of this position:

"What then is the post-modern? What place does it or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the question hurled at the rules of the image and narration? It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday, must be suspected. . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism, thus understood, is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant."<sup>18</sup>

Lyotard's argument contains its own challenge. The reason with which he justifies collapsing postmodernism into modernism is: the disappearance of the "master narratives" under the influence of information and communication technology. As such his argument can be said to contain a challenge to itself, as the disappearance of "master narratives" is considered by many to be a distinct characteristic of the postmodern condition. The conflict between the two positions reflects a difference in the

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question; What is Postmodernism?" *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): 71-82.

degree of sensitivity to the critical field examined, and the scale of the historical project undertaken. In compliance to the notion of "nonholistic," "multilineal" history, one is compelled to avoid historiographical models which propose a reading of history on a scale insensitive to the complexities of the cultural setting (macro-history)<sup>19</sup> to readings of a micro-scale.

In "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson forwards a critical reading of the cultural field which, while acknowledging the notion of continuity between the earlier and the later phase, articulates distinctive features of the second; the postmodern condition:

". . . even if all the constitutive features of postmodernism were identical and continuous with those of an older modernism. . . the two phenomena would still remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function."<sup>20</sup>

To avoid the trap of historical periodization with its inherent tendency towards simplification and homogeneity, Jameson describes the postmodern as a "cultural dominant": "a concept which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of different, yet subordinate features."<sup>21</sup> Of those features, he lists: consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society, and high-tech society. Despite their variety, those cultural features, Jameson argues, demonstrate one fundamental fact: "that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and omnipresence of class struggle."<sup>22</sup> Instead, it obeys the laws of a more developed and

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault's historiographical model, with its notion of the three major "epistemes"; the classical, that of enlightenment, and the modern is the prototype of this macro-history.

<sup>20</sup> F. Jameson, "Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146, (1984 ): 53-92.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp..55-56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p..55.

totalitarian mode of capitalism, which he calls late capitalism. The difference in meaning and social function between modernism and postmodernism stems from the different position that postmodernism occupies in the economic system of late capitalism.

Postmodernism, thus understood, can be defined as a stage in the evolution of post-industrial capitalist Western societies, in which the different constituents of the cultural system of these societies exhibit a particular state of correlation. This state of correlation can be approached from a number of angles depending on the ideological position of the historian. Hence, the plausibility of approaching postmodern societies as consumer societies, media societies, or information societies. In this study, we will approach the postmodern society as consumer society.

It becomes obvious at this point that this study is developing along two lines of reasoning. The first argues for the multilineal nonholistic historiography. The second argues that the different characteristics of the historical context "obey"-- despite any apparent contradiction-- an overriding logic, the logic of late or monopoly capitalism. To reconcile those two lines of reasoning in one inquiry, I would like to call upon Foucault's model of knowledge as a discursive field.

#### *Ideology and cultural systems*

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault presents a theoretical model of knowledge as a discursive power relation. This model is built on the premise that ideology never acts as a pure force, but rather through affecting and being affected by other ideologies. Knowledge is constructed through the discursive power relation between ideologies.

Cultural systems are reflections of this discursive power relation between the ideologies operating in a given field. Within any epistemological context, particular ideologies assume a position of primacy. As such, they play a dominant role in defining the cultural setting. The potential for an ideology to assume a primary role is a function of the nature of the ideology in question

Despite a tradition of difference and disagreement that characterizes the contemporary critical scene, there is a shared agreement on the primacy of capitalist ideology in the making of the cultural systems of Western societies. There is further agreement on the strong relation between capitalist ideology and the postmodern condition.

Arguments for the primacy of capitalist ideology are built on the centrality of the concept of "total administration" in the capitalist logic. In the core of this concept operates the logic of fragmentation. Disappearing under the argument of 'division of labour', this logic reduces all fields of knowledge to fragmentary compartments.<sup>23</sup> This in turn undermines the autonomy of the various disciplines built on the basis of this fragmentation. A sense of the degree of control which capitalist ideology has come to exercise on Western societies can be sensed in Tafuri's statement:

" It is useless to cry over a proven fact: ideology has changed into reality, even if the romantic dreams of the intellectuals who proposed to guide the destiny of the productive universe has remained, logically, in the super-structural sphere of utopia. As historians, our task is to reconstruct lucidly

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<sup>23</sup> M. Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, ( New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980 ): 171-217.

the road traversed by intellectual labor, thereby recognizing the contingent tasks to which a new organization of labor can respond."<sup>24</sup>

### *Architecture and Capitalist Ideology*

Being directly related to the reality of production, architecture was quick to accept the consequences of capitalist ideology manifested in its commercialization. Jameson argues that: "architecture is of all the arts that closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship."<sup>25</sup>

This meant the creation of an ideological situation in architectural discourse - both theoretical and artifactual- ready to be fully integrated at all levels, with the mechanism of production, distribution, and consumption in the new capitalist context. "By this standard, [Tafuri argues], the fate of capitalist society is not at all extraneous to architectural design. The ideology of design is essential to the integration of the modern capitalism in all the structures and superstructures of human existence."<sup>26</sup>

It becomes useless, in view of this asserted condition, to engage the architectural production of capitalist societies on the level of pure architectural positions and alternatives. Instead, reflection on architecture,"in as much as it is a criticism of the concrete realized ideology of architecture itself," cannot but go beyond this to arrive at a political dimension. This study will continuously engage the question to what extent decisions taken

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<sup>24</sup> M. Tafuri, *The Sphere and The Labyrinth*, ( Cambridge,Mass.: MIT Press, 1987 ), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Jameson," Postmodernism or the. . . ", pp.56-57.

<sup>26</sup> M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 179.



in the specific domain of postmodern architecture reflect the larger system of capitalist ideology.

### *Consumer Society*

The writings of Jean Baudrillard, who is celebrated as one of the major contributors to the discourse of postmodernism, promise to be particularly useful for the purpose of this study. In developing a critique of capitalist ideology, he challenges the "orthodox" and conventional" faith in Marxism. His position is understood to have been deeply influenced by an attitude which appeared in France in the 1960s, following the rebellious attack on the university intellectual establishment, and its radical efforts to seek new critical theories and discourse.

Trained as a sociologist in the 1960 and 70s, Baudrillard merged the Marxist critique of capitalism with studies of consumption, fashion, media, sexuality and consumer society. His texts are often read as an effort to update and reconstruct Marxian theory in light of the then new social conditions appearing in France. Baudrillard's project is believed to have generated through the influence of his sociology teacher, Henri Lefebvre.<sup>27</sup> Since the 1940s Lefebvre had been calling for a "critique of everyday life" and the expansion of Marxism toward theorization of the conditions, problems, and possibilities for change within everyday life.<sup>28</sup>

In discussing the particularities of the different phases in the evolution of capitalist ideology, Baudrillard underlines the

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<sup>27</sup> Lefebvre had published a whole series of volumes on Marxism, including early texts written while he was a member of the Communist Party and later texts which attempted to reconstruct and develop Marxism in a creative way after his expulsion from the Party in 1956.

<sup>28</sup> This historical information is based on Douglas Kellner's *Jean Baudrillard; from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, ( Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989 ), 1-6.

element of continuity, thus avoiding the notion of radical breaks and ruptures. While accepting the element of continuity, he nevertheless, acknowledges the particularity of the postmodern condition, describing it as a state of "intensification" of this logic. Thus, reinforcing Jameson's thesis.

In describing the postmodern condition, Baudrillard places particular emphasis on the notion of consumption, redefining it as the primary mode of cultural communication and expression: "We have reached the point where "consumption " has grasped the whole of life; where all activities are sequenced in the same combinatorial mode; where the schedule of gratification is outlined in advance, one hour at a time; and where the "environment" is complete, completely climatized, furnished, and culturalized. In the phenomenology of consumption, the general climatization of life, of goods, objects, services, behaviors, and social relations represents the perfected, "consummated," stage of evolution which, through articulate networks of objects, ascends from pure time, and finally to the systematic organization of ambiance, which is characteristic of the drugstores, the shopping malls, or the modern airports in our futuristic cities."<sup>29</sup>

While assuming a critical reception of Baudrillard's thesis in the course of this study, the critical effort will only be directed to varifying the applicability of the argument to the field of architectural production, and highlighting its capacity to reveal particular characteristics of this production. As such, this study will concern itself with tracing the theoretical origins and revealing the epistemological structure of Baudrillard's argument, only in so far as such efforts may enlighten the use of his thesis for the stated purpose of the study.

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<sup>29</sup> J. Baudrillard, " Consumer Society," in *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed., ( Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988 ): 33.

### *Methodology*

The thesis will develop in four stages according to the following model: I. Discussion of Baudrillard's thesis on capitalism and consumption. II. A number of the constituents of the postmodern architecture polemic will be examined. III. Baudrillard's argument will be tested on case studies. IV. Conclusion.

No definitive understanding of postmodernism is possible while it still is in the making. Engaging with such a critical field requires a particular method of criticism. In view of the ideological nature of this exercise an operative model of criticism will be adopted.

Operative criticism is defined as an ideological exercise--in the Marxist sense of the term-- which renounces systematic expression in favour of a compromise with daily contingencies. Its model is journalistic extravaganza rather than the definitive essay which is complete in itself. The continuity and promptness of the polemic is, in this sense, more valuable than the single article. Criticism as intervention in depth is dropped in favour of an uninterrupted critical process, valid globally and outside the conditions met in its evolution. The varying objectives of the polemic will justify the arbitrariness of the critical cuts, their alteration and casual errors committed on the way.<sup>30</sup>

The second characteristic of this model of criticism is the necessity to adjust the scale of its field of investigation from the analysis of the architectural object to the criticism of the global context which conditions its configuration. The structure of the

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<sup>30</sup> In *Theories and History of Architecture*, Tafuri forwards a critical discussion of operative criticism which helps bring forward its basic characteristics.

M. Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), 141-153.

context under investigation -- laws, regulations, social and professional customs, means of production, and economic systems-- will confront individual works of architecture only in a secondary way; "utilizing them as particular phenomena of a more general structure representing the context on which criticism will act."<sup>31</sup>

The architectural works selected for the study will be confronted only to the verify the extent to which they conform to, or negate the particular hypothesis in question: this being the immanence of the logic of consumption in the definition of postmodern architectural production.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.153.

## **Consumer Society**



## The Ideological Context

### **The Third Phase of Political Economy: Monopoly Capitalism**

Baudrillard's critique of consumer society ties its emergence to what he describes as a "revolutionary" change in the logic of political economy, manifested in the evolution of a new mode of capitalism; monopoly capitalism. This revolutionary phase of political economy corresponds to the third phase in Marx's genealogy of the system of exchange-value. As presented in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx observes three phases for the evolution of exchange-value:

- 1- Only the surplus of material production is exchanged (in archaic and feudal production, for example). Vast sectors remain outside the sphere of exchange and commodification.
- 2- The entire volume of "industrial" material production is alienated in exchange (capitalist political economy).
- 3- Even what is considered inalienable (divided but not exchanged)-virtue, knowledge, consciousness, also falls into the sphere of exchange value.

In disagreement with Marx and the Marxists who see the relation between phase 2 and phase 3 as a kind of extensive effect, Baudrillard sees it as revolutionary. This revolutionary change is characterized by the substitution of the concept of "planned socialization" for that of "material exploitation," as the central project of capitalism. Consequently, this marked the passage from the realm of political economy, with its dialectical tension between use-value and exchange-value, to that of the political economy of the sign, with the supremacy of sign-exchange value. As such, monopoly capitalism is understood to command

"a structure of control and power much more subtle and more totalitarian than that of exploitation."<sup>32</sup>

### **The Code: planned socialization**

Planned socialization is the project of administering all social values and social exchange. Baudrillard argues that capitalism achieved the state of monopoly it enjoys today only by "radicalizing its logic" and expanding its own field of operation to manage: "not only the field of material production but the whole field of social relations, of culture and daily life." It is on this point that he takes serious issue with those he refers to as "conservative Marxists" for their "rigid insistence" on class struggle as the fundamental theme, and material production and exchange as the primary mode of cultural exchange. Baudrillard argues that by appropriating the whole spectrum of social values, and controlling the mechanisms of social exchange, capitalism was able to **absorb**<sup>33</sup> the traditional negative dialectic -in the Marxist sense- and imposed on the societies a new state of consciousness, free of this dialectic. This he refers to as "the code". In the context of the code, there exists but one operative value, which is: the "form-sign." And one mode of exchange, that is: sign-exchange value.

Baudrillard describes the code as a state of "hyperreality", a "virtual world constructed for the benefit of the form-sign." Advertising and the media, in general, are the structure of the code, the spider's web in which consciousness is trapped. In an

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<sup>32</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, ( St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 121.

<sup>33</sup> The use of the term 'absorb' connotes that while the dialectical negativity between production and consumption still operates, it nevertheless does so on an unconscious level, and is no longer a constituent of the conscious psyche of the society.



effort to establish credibility for this virtual construct, Baudrillard attacks the notion of the 'real'. Expressing his discontent with the 'traditional' understanding of reality and illusion as polar extremities he writes:

"The idea of the world as being constituted only by signs is some sort of magic thinking. For it does entail that the 'real' -- and any sort of 'reality'-- that one sees in the world is quite simply an absolute utopia. The rationality that one has to invoke in order to make the world 'real' is really just a product of the power of thought itself, which is itself totally anti-rational and anti-materialistic. . . One has to recognize the reality of illusion, and one must play upon this illusion itself and the power it exerts."<sup>34</sup>

The monopolistic nature of the code, Baudrillard explains, is primarily a function of the "architecture" of the mass media. This is founded upon the strategic definition of communication as the simple transmission/ reception of a message, "whether or not the latter is considered reversible through feedback."<sup>35</sup> As such, the system of social control and power is rooted in it. The code is constructed through a continuous monologue, or better, a one-way dialogue. The generalized order of the code is one which no longer permits giving, reimbursing, or exchange, but only allows taking and appropriating:

"The generalized order of consumption is nothing other than that sphere where it is no longer permitted to give, to reimburse, or to exchange but only to take and make use of (appropriation, individualized use value). In this case, consumption goods also constitute a mass medium: they answer to the general state of affairs. Their specific function is of little importance."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J. Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, ( Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1988 ), 44-46.

<sup>35</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," *Video Culture*, John Hanhardt ed., (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986 ): 128-129.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.130.

A second fundamental constituent of the architecture of the media is its "omnipresence." Mass media, particularly in the form of advertising, invades every domain of life, both public and private. Being directly related to the economic enterprise, advertising stands as material evidence of the proliferation of consumption in the operation of culture under the code.

### **Form-Sign**

Let us now return to an important component in the equation of monopoly capitalism; the form-sign. The sign Baudrillard utilizes is an independent entity, an operational structure which, by lending itself to structural manipulation, "has replaced good old political economy" as the theoretical basis of the system. The clearest description of the form-sign emerges when Baudrillard uses the semiological model to explain the change between the 'traditional sign' and the new form-sign.

During what he referred to as the "classical era of signification," --with its referential psychology-- the signifier referred to a signified. In the era of monopoly capitalism, the form-sign describes an entirely different organization: "the signified and referent are now abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers." The signifier becomes its own referent and the use-value of the sign disappears to the benefit of its own communication and exchange-value alone. The sign no longer designates any aspect of reality. Instead, it refers to, and only to, other signs creating a state of hyper-reference. There is a short-circuit in the system, so to speak.

To explain the state of "hyperreality", Baudrillard draws a schematic historical movement of the evolution of the sign.<sup>37</sup> The first stage of this history begins and culminates with the phase where signs lead from one to another according to the logic of illusion. The second phase is the phase of rationality, characterized by the production of the reality-effect by the sign. What followed was the "game" of the dialectic of the sign, the game whereby reality would be posited against the immanence of the sign. The movement in this direction, he argues, reached its apotheosis in the arrival of the media. While, in the earlier stages, the sign operated on the basis of its own functioning as sign; "as illusion or reality-effect", this is no more the case in the age of the media. With the advent of media came the loss of the prior state of total illusion, of the sign as magic. Now in this stage of "hyperreality," we are dealing with a sign that posits the principle of the absolute absence of reality: "We went beyond the reality principle a long time ago, and now the game which is being played is no longer being played in the world of pure illusion. It is as if we are now in a shameful and sinful state, a post-illusion state."

The form-sign is not to be confused with the function of social differentiation by sign. This form [form-sign] applies to the whole social process, and is largely unconscious. Arguing that the function of differentiation by the sign is for its part contemporaneous with the bourgeois class, Baudrillard proposes that in the stage of monopoly capitalism the ownership of the means of production is no longer a decisive factor in the symbolic structuring of social values.<sup>38</sup> The revolutionary

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<sup>37</sup> In describing the stages of the evolution of the sign Baudrillard argues that they are not necessarily chronological, but certainly "logical ones." J. Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1988), 49.

<sup>38</sup> He defines the bourgeois class as: "a moneyed class nostalgic for cast values." He further argues that since the French moralists of the 17th

change introduced by the form-sign to the capitalist system, he argues, is comparable in its total impact on society to that brought about by the industrial revolution. "And it would be absurd to say that this logic of the sign concerns only the ruling class or the middle class which is hungry for distinction."<sup>39</sup> Rather, this form is understood to apply to the whole social spectrum, or process, and is largely unconscious.

The third, and last, component of Baudrillard's construct next to 'the code' and the 'form-sign' is the notion of 'simulation.' Before moving on to discuss the notion of simulation, I would like to pose and discuss a weakness in Baudrillard's argument.

All through his argument Baudrillard seems to be struggling to create space for his new construct. To do so, he follows a scheme whereby he attempts to replace the constituents of the earlier social condition, the earlier code so to speak, by the new. In so doing, he is unable to move to the new situation without supporting his move (argument) on those very constituents he wants to replace. The clearest example of this problematic maneuver is his discussion of the absorption of the dialectical tension between production and consumption, in the phase of monopoly capitalism. His argument rests on the very notion that capitalism, by means of maneuvers which we have discussed earlier, was able to reach a state of monopoly only through the absorption of the dialectical tension. Thus, in the same breath with which he announces the victory of monopoly capitalism over the dialectic, he declares its dependence on the presence of

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century, there has been a long literature on the social psychology of distinction and prestige that is connected with the consolidation of the bourgeoisie as a class, and that today is generalized to all the middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie.

J. Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 122-123.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.122-123.

this dialectic. Hence the instability of his argument. In view of this instability, I would like to argue that monopoly capitalism, not being able to completely eliminate the presence of the dialectical tension, is continuously in danger of collapsing into this very dialectic.

A second example which illustrates the same problem, is the notion of the transcendence of the form-sign over the operation of social classification. This again necessitates the presence of a society that operates on the notion of social stratification, and class struggle; at least as a starting point. Otherwise, the very notion of transcending class stratification is devoid of merit. Obviously Baudrillard is aware of the impossibility of complete disposition of the foundation issues upon which he builds his argument, and this is precisely why he moves to operate in a "hyperreal" space.

Baudrillard constructs the state of "hyperreality" by mutating Lacan's model of the relation between the 'real' the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic.' He drops the 'real' out of the system on the basis that the real itself is but another imaginary; a construct in its own right. We are henceforth left suspended between the 'symbolic' and the 'imaginary'.

## Simulation

Simulation marks the passage from the dialectic of the 'real' to the order of the 'sign' itself. Arguing that the real is in-itself a construct formulated through rational processes, Baudrillard attacks the value of 'absoluteness' attributed to it. Rationality itself is an abstract, and as such, a removed process. "The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks, and command models. With these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times."<sup>40</sup> As such, the 'real', is rejected as referential, to be accepted as operational.

Simulation is not an act of representation, and should not be understood as such. Rather, it is an act of substitution- the substitution of one construct by another. The sign no longer refers to a referent, but to itself. To substantiate his point, Baudrillard schematizes a history of representation:<sup>41</sup>

- in the first phase, the image was a reflection of what is accepted as a basic reality.
- in the second phase, the image masks and prevents that reality.
- in the third phase, it masks the absence of a basic reality.
- and in the phase of simulation, it bears no relation to any reality what so ever: it is its own simulacrum:

"what was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived out on earth as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into 'reality', without any metaphor at all"<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>41</sup> Baudrillard explains that the order of the phases is evolutionary but not in a strict historical sense.

<sup>42</sup> Op.Cit, p.4.

In a context characterized by the omnipresence of communication in the form of mass media, 'information' assumes the value of what was considered 'real.' The distance between knowledge and information disappears, and the two continuously collapse into each other. Under the hegemony of the code, of which mass media is the primary mechanism of social and cultural communication, simulation becomes the only 'reality.' All mediums of communication, including language, painting and architecture operate through the logic of simulation.

What Baudrillard's argument suggests in terms of the aesthetic experience is the collapse of 'aesthetic distance.'<sup>43</sup> The ramifications of such a proposal on the nature of the aesthetic experience will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Aesthetic distance' is a critic's phrase intended to remind the spectator ( reader, etc.) that a work of art is not to be confused with reality, and its conventions must be fully respected.

*Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Alan Bullock and Stephen Tromblet ed.s., ( New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988 )

## The Parody of Disciplined Consumption

"We don't realize how much the current introduction into systematic and organized consumption is the equivalent and the extension, in the twentieth century, of the great introduction of rural population into industrial labor, which occurred throughout the nineteenth century."<sup>44</sup>

In this process of planned socialization, which is the project of monopolistic capitalism, consumption no longer corresponds to the phenomenology of affluence, symbolic of earlier phases, but is rather instituted as control. Demand and need correspond more and more to a mode of simulation. "Consumption no longer has a value of enjoyment per se. " Behind these logics (consumption as the production of signs, differentiation, status and prestige) in some way descriptive and analytical, there was already the dream of symbolic exchange, a dream of the status of the object and consumption beyond exchange and use, beyond value and equivalence."<sup>45</sup>

The postmodern society is the consumer society par excellence, not because of its ability to consume more material products, but because the act of consumption has grown to become the primary social and cultural experience. In the article "Consumer Society", Baudrillard attacks the 'naive' understanding of consumption on the basis of material need:

"Until now, the analysis of consumption has been founded on the naive anthropology of *homo economicus*, or at best *homo psychoeconomicus*. It is a theory of needs, of objects (in the fullest sense), and of satisfactions within the ideological extension of classical political economy. This is really not a theory. It is an immense tautology: "I buy this because I need

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<sup>44</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Consumer Society", *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed., (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988 ): 50.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster ed., (Washington: Bay Press, 1983 ): 126.



it" is equivalent to the claim that fire burns because of its phlogistic essence...No theory of consumption is possible at this level: the immediately self-evident, such as an analysis in terms of needs, will never produce anything more than a consumed reflection on consumption."<sup>46</sup>

Consumption 'redefined' through the logic of structural semiotics becomes a comprehensive experience. A system which assures the regulation of signs and the integration of the group: "it is simultaneously a morality and a system of communication." Consumers are mutually implicated in a general system of exchange and production of "coded values." In this sense, consumption is a system of meaning, like language, or like kinship systems in primitive societies. It is a social function, and a structural organization that transcends individuals, and is imposed on them according to an unconscious social constraint, the 'code'.

Baudrillard presents an understanding of consumption as a collective act. Building on the position that: "what is being consumed is not the object but the system of objects," he argues against the understanding of this act as one of distinction and stratification of status:

"Consumption is not ,as one might generally imagine, an indeterminate marginal sector where an individual, elsewhere constrained by social rules, would finally recover, in his private sphere."<sup>47</sup>

The uniqueness of Baudrillard's argument lies not in his proposition to understand the capitalist society as a consumer society, but rather in the manner in which, through the manipulation of structural semiotics, he manages to promote the experience of consumption to a position whereby it brackets

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<sup>46</sup> Op.Cit, " Consumer Society", p.44.

<sup>47</sup> J. Baudrillard, " System of Objects," *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed., ( Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988 ): 23-24.

consciousness itself. Other works which adopted the same approach and attempted to describe the postmodern society from the point of the experience of consumption, stopped short of presenting propositions of comparable radicality. John Fekete's description of structural semiotics as: "the theoretical complement to the neo-capitalist cultural semiosis of never-ending signifying practice... a positivism that accepts this semiosis as the eternal ontology of social being"<sup>48</sup>, seems conservative by contrast. Baudrillard goes a step, further -- stretching the argument to the very end-- by arguing that what is being described here is not the theoretical complement but the actual embodied form of "everyday life in the modern world."<sup>49</sup>

*Consumption and the origin of need.*

For the benefit of an articulate assessment of the sense of radicality in Baudrillard's thesis, a comparison with Galbraith's position will be undertaken. The decision to chose Galbraith as a reference of comparison rests on the fact that Baudrillard basis his critique of monopoly capitalism on Galbraith's thesis.

In *The Affluent Society*, and *New Industrial State*. Galbraith forwards the argument that the fundamental problem of contemporary capitalism is no longer the contradiction between the "maximization of profit" and the "rationalization of production," but rather a contradiction between a virtually unlimited productivity (at the level of technostucture) and the need to dispose of the product. It becomes vital for the system at this stage to control not only the mechanism of production, but also consumer demand. Galbraith calls this new condition the "revised sequence," in opposition to the "accepted sequence" whereby the consumer is presumed to have the initiative which

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<sup>48</sup> John Fekete, *The critical Twilight* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977), 197.

<sup>49</sup> Op.Cit., "Consumer Society," p.46.

will reflect back, through the market, to the manufacturers. Here, on the contrary, the manufacturers control behavior, as well as direct and model social attitudes and needs. In its tendencies at least, this is a total dictatorship by the sector of production.

In its imperialist expansion, the technostucture generates "artificial accelerators" to boost the demand, thus trapping the consumer in a vicious circle of infinite gratification. Galbraith qualifies two types of gratification: "authentic" gratification, and "artificial" gratification. While authentic gratification is a function of a "natural" faculty of "economic principle" that man commands, "artificial" gratification is a product of the capacity of "artificial accelerators" to create artificial desires and needs, the fulfillment of which will translate in a state of gratification.<sup>50</sup>

Baudrillard takes issue with Galbraith, describing his differentiation between authentic and artificial gratification as naive. Baudrillard's disagreement stems from his disbelief in any basis of qualification for gratification:

"It is nevertheless, from the perspective of satisfaction of the consumer, that there can be no basis on which to define what is "artificial" and what is not. The pleasure obtained from a television or a second home is experienced as "real" freedom."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This notion has to be understood in relation to Galbraith's position that individual needs can indeed be stabilized. He argues that there exists in human *nature* something like an *economic principle* that would lead man, were it not for "artificial accelerators," to impose limits on his own objectives, on his needs and at the same time on his efforts. In short, there is a tendency towards satisfaction which is not viewed as optimizing, but rather as "harmonious" and balanced at the level of the individual. This in turn brings about a society that is itself a harmony of collective needs.

<sup>51</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Consumer Society," *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed., (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988): 39.



**DESPITE WHAT SOME PEOPLE THINK,  
ADVERTISING CAN'T MAKE YOU  
BUY SOMETHING YOU DON'T NEED.**

Some people would have you believe that you are partly in the hands of every advertiser in the country.

They think that when advertising is put under your nose, your mind turns to control.

It makes you nervous. Subliminal seduction. Brain washing. Mind control. It's advertising.

And you are a paymaster for it.

It explains why your kitchen cupboard is full of food you never eat.

Why your garage is full of cars you never drive.

Why your house is full of books you don't read.

Why you don't watch, hear, or do anything, and clothes you don't wear.

You don't have a choice. You are forced to buy.

That's why, this message is a clearly designed advertisement to get you to buy, and in the process, it can save you, and it can save your money.

**ADVERTISING**

ANOTHER WORD FOR FREEDOM OF CHOICE.

1. A poster promoting the use of advertising, Graphis, no. 247, Jan./Feb., 1987.

Galbraith's proposition that "needs are the fruits of production" assumes that in the production of specific goods and services, manufacturers simultaneously produce all the powers of suggestion necessary for the product to be accepted. Baudrillard argues that if the issue of need is to be engaged at this level, then we will have to end up rendering the thesis of conditioning as false. But then, what are we to make of advertising and the consumer directed mass media, "To accept the falsity of the thesis of conditioning is to live blindfolded"<sup>52</sup> ( fig.1).

Instead, Baudrillard proposes that "the system of needs is the product of the system of production." Needs are not produced one at a time in relation to their respective objects, but are rather produced as a *force of consumption*, "a general potential reserve", within the larger framework of productive forces.<sup>53</sup> The point is not to claim that there are no needs or natural utilities, but rather to see that consumption, as a concept specific to contemporary society, is not organized along these lines. What is sociologically significant for contemporary society is the generalized reorganization of this primary level in a system of signs, which appears to be a particular mode of transition from *nature* to culture. This, he argues, is a mode specific to our era:

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.40

<sup>53</sup> Baudrillard supports his hypothesis by presenting a *genealogy of consumption* that traces the history of the industrial system:

" 1. The order of production produces the productive machine/force, a technical system that is radically different from traditional tools.

2. It produces the rationalized productive capital/force, a rational system of investment and circulation that is radically different from previous forms of "wealth" and modes of exchange.

3. It produces the wage-labour force, an abstract and systematized productive force that is radically different from concrete labor and traditional "workmanship".

4. In this way it produces needs, *the system of needs*, the productive demand/force as a rationalized, controlled and integrated whole, complementary to the three others in a process of the total control of productive forces and production processes.

Ibid, p.42

Marketing, purchasing, sales, the acquisition of differentiated commodities and object/signs-- all of these presently constitute our language, a code with which our entire society communicates and speaks of and to itself. Such is the present day structure of communication: a language (*langue*) in opposition to which individual needs and pleasures are but the *effects of speech (parole)*."54

By using the semiotic and linguistic model, Baudrillard raises the issue of the arbitrariness of association of an object to a specific need and the issue of *reality*. His continuous challenge to the *natural* as the basis or origin of authentic need and consequently authentic gratification is based on his understanding of the real as a result ( a construct) of "semiurgical" manipulation.

Not negating the value of Galbraith's efforts to qualify gratification, in so far as it allows an understanding of an act of manipulation to which we are all subjected, one will have to agree with Baudrillard's assessment of the great difficulty, to the extent of virtual impossibility, of escaping the state of conditioning created by the "artificial accelerators." This argument becomes even more convincing when assessing the situation on the scale of masses rather than individuals.

The discussion of the role of advertising as "artificial accelerator," will further enlighten our comprehension of Baudrillard's understanding of consumption as the primary social experience. Galbraith argues that advertising plays a capital role in the manufacturer's operation of controlling the behavior of the consumer by appearing to be in harmony with commodities and the needs of the individual. Through advertising the system appropriates social goals for its own gain,

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54 Ibid, p.48

and imposes its own objectives as social goals: "What's good for General Motors is good for you." Baudrillard takes Galbraith's thesis further, arguing that under the hegemony of the code, the very act of appropriation disappears. The system creates or generates values, and not simply appropriates them. The social goals and values of societies under monopoly capitalism, are those of the system. It is only in such a context that an aggressive ad line as IBM's : "I think therefore IBM" is accepted with ease, without perceiving the aggressiveness implicit in it.

But why do people "take the bait", why are they vulnerable to this strategy? The answer, Baudrillard suggests, is because the processes of class and caste distinction are basic to the social structure, and are fully operational in "democratic societies." "Thus consumption becomes, not a function of 'harmonious' individual satisfaction (hence limited to the rules of "nature" as Galbraith suggests), but rather an infinite social activity"<sup>55</sup> (fig. 2).

By so arguing, Baudrillard contradicts his definition of the "form-sign," and consequently challenges his own argument of the monopoly of the system. The form-sign was defined as free from the predicament of social stratification;" thus applies to the whole social process." If the main incentive behind the frenzy of consumption, remains to be the "class and caste distinction," then what role remains for the "form-sign?"

The writings of Baudrillard suggest an understanding of the "form-sign," as an "artificial accelerator," in of itself. The system creates and operates on this form to hide, but only hide, the process of social stratification under such notions as social

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.41

WE'D LOVE TO SELL  
YOU ERNO LASZLO  
SKINCARE.

BUT WE JUST CAN'T.

WE CAN ONLY SELL ERNO LASZLO  
SKINCARE TO ERNO LASZLO MEMBERS.  
PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN ANALYZED  
BY A SPECIALIST AND ASSIGNED  
A SPECIFIC RITUAL OF PRODUCTS. IT'S  
WHY WE GET THE RESULTS WE DO  
AND HOW WE PROTECT OUR ENVI-  
ABLE REPUTATION.

WE WORK THIS WAY BECAUSE WE  
DON'T WANT YOU TO WASTE YOUR  
MONEY OR YOUR TIME. AND THAT'S  
EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE DOING WHEN  
YOU BUY A CLEANSER HERE, A MOIS-  
TURIZER THERE, AND A "CELLULAR  
MIRACLE" SOMEPLACE ELSE.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT US, OUR  
PRODUCTS AND YOUR SKIN, COME  
TALK TO AN ERNO LASZLO SPECIALIST.  
AND IF YOU'D LIKE TO BECOME A MEM-  
BER, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS ASK.

ERNO LASZLO  
SKINCARE

Neiman Marcus

2. Neiman Marcus advertisement which operates on the notion of class and caste distinction, Vogue, October 1989.



democracy, and total accessibility. The credit card comes in handy to illustrate this point. It is a means of abolishing the notion of stratification by providing the possibility of accessibility. "The card frees us from checks, cash, and even from financial difficulties at the end of the month."<sup>56</sup> It frees the consumer, momentarily, from the limitations as defined by his position in the system. Nevertheless, to the dismay of Baudrillard, the credit card still embodies the notion of social stratification expressed in the difference between the gold and the green cards, for example. It follows therefore, that the state of "hyperreality" cannot sustain itself indefinitely, and is bound to collapse revealing the reality behind it. It would be naive to argue that the reality then revealed will still operate along historically preceding models of social systems, as it would also be naive to assume that the state of "hyperreality," and the form-sign would remain to function indefinitely.

At any rate this discussion will eventually lead us to the concrete fact that the social system operating under monopoly capitalism remains hierarchical in nature. Its measure of difference from that operated under competitive capitalism lies not in the abolishing of the process of stratification, but rather in the changing of the mechanism of the process. The lines demarcating the stratified social layers are not drawn on the basis of the ownership of means of production, rather, they are drawn in relation to society's capacity to satisfy a growing appetite for consumption.

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<sup>56</sup> Op.Cit., "Consumer Society," p.34.

## Against Determinism

What Baudrillard offers in his thesis is more than just an analysis of the logic of monopoly capitalism and the primacy of consumption. His thesis is no less than a theory of catastrophe, "of Nietzschean nihilism," based on a deterministic reading of the totalitarian authority of capital with the help of technology. Having adopted a position which rejects totalitarian and deterministic theories, we will accept the primacy of the logic of consumption in Late capitalist societies, but reject the notion of total collapse into the code, into simulation. In other words, we will accept the *facts* but not the *conclusion*..

Baudrillard's theory of simulation, and the end of political economy can be understood as an extension "in vertigo" of the position of the situationist's proposition that: "when reality is systematically turned into spectacle, the spectacle itself becomes reality." This does not necessitate, however, the complete loss of reality as Baudrillard suggests by declaring that : "An outside of simulation is no longer possible."

A discussion of the origin of the tone of skepticism in Baudrillard's thesis may prove helpful in allowing for an informed and discriminate use of his thesis. As discussed earlier, Baudrillard's early position and his logic of argumentation was deeply influenced by the the radicalism that appeared in France in the 1960s. The failure of the 1968 movement to achieve its goals was a source of disappointment for this Marxist critic. More so was the continuous and increasingly aggressive proliferation of the commodity into new areas of culture. Baudrillard's affiliation with Marxist critique turned into severe criticism against its "conventional" and "rigid" understanding of the reality of the cultural condition. His receptive attitude towards affirmative media optimism as

instigated by McLuhan in the 1960s turned into an equally affirmative attitude of media cynicism in the 80s. The increasing impact of media and its growing potential inspired him to rewrite the anthropological project of culture as a system of communication in terms of contemporary communications technology;" this resulted in a kind of technological *Geistesgeschichte* ."57 All of this, Huyssen argues, may be understood to express the post-1968 despair of the leftist French intellectuals that "there is no real *Left* left."58

In view of this I am inclined to accept Baudrillard's notion of simulation and the primacy of consumption as the "reality" in the current state of affairs, representing, as it were, the central , yet not the only, aspect of a cultural transformation-- a transformation which separates what we define as postmodern condition from an earlier age.

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57 Ibid. p.12.

58 Ibid. p.8.



## **In the Nature of Consumption**



## The Discourse Reconsidered

'Complexity and contradiction', 'pluralism', and sign-architecture, are three constituents of central importance in the polemic of postmodern architecture. Through a variety of arguments, these notions were propagated to "free" architecture from what was believed to be a "dogmatic" discourse. Any understanding of postmodern architectural production will have to start by addressing these notions. Baudrillard's thesis on the ideological logic of monopoly capitalism allows for an understanding of these notions from a new perspective.

### **The State of Complicit Contradiction: Complexity and Contradiction as False Dialectic**

In his analysis of monopoly capitalism, Baudrillard highlights two basic attributes of its logic. The first, is its capacity to absorb the traditional Marxist definition of contradiction as a dialectical relation between production and consumption. The second, is its tendency to promote a state of continuous "cultural revolution," characterized by attitudes of negation. This revolution is, nevertheless, unable to fulfill its role as 'revolution' by failing to negate the monopoly of the system. As such those revolutions are but 'contained effects', directed against those paradigms, the collapse of which would help expand the operational domain of the code.

The notion of complexity and contradiction, first presented by Robert Venturi, grew to become an important polemical constituent of the postmodern architectural discourse, and a prominent characteristic of its production.<sup>59</sup> In its essence, this

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<sup>59</sup> In addressing the notion of "Complexity and contradiction," I will treat Venturi's two books; *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, and *Learning from Las Vegas* as one theoretical project.

notion calls for a 'revolutionary' change of the predicaments of architectural practice as thought to have been propagated by the modernists.

Baudrillard's analysis of the logic of monopoly capitalism undermines the legitimacy of the alleged "revolutionary potential" of this notion, reducing it to a "contained effect of the code."

Capital's capacity to absorb the traditional Marxist definition of contradiction is a function of the problematic nature of the definition, as well as "capitalism's ability to radicalize its own logic." The problematic nature of the Marxist position stems from the "rigid insistence on class struggle" as the fundamental theme, and on material production and exchange as the primary mode of cultural exchange. According to the conservative Marxist vision, class contradiction, expressed through the mechanism of production and exploitation, is the only means "to articulate a subversive moment which calls the system into question." Thus, by diffusing class contradiction, capitalism can absorb the dialectical 'negativity' between production and consumption (exploitation)<sup>60</sup>. This, he argues, is indeed what capitalism has done continuously:

"During the last hundred years, capitalism has been able to prevent serious social and political changes by absorbing contradictions when they were posed [only] at the level of material production."

Capitalist ideology absorbed the contradiction by expanding its field of operation to manage not only the field of material production but the whole field of social relations, "of culture and daily life." In so doing, it did not only render the Marxist

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<sup>60</sup> We have argued earlier in the course of this study, that the notion of fragmentation is a central notion in the administrative capitalist logic. Through the alibi of specialization and the division of labour this administrative logic continuously contains and diffuses class contradiction. Yet, it does not eliminate them completely.



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'material logic' partial , but was able to internalize it in its own discourse. Baudrillard argues that: "By making itself an accomplice of this diversion, Marxism is very simply exploited by capitalism as a force in ideological labor (spontaneous and benevolent)." <sup>61</sup>

By expanding its logic to the fields of consumption, signification, information and knowledge, capitalism generated a cultural revolution. Yet, the "cultural revolution" which corresponds to the radicalized logic of capital is not the developed form of all economic-political revolution. The two differ in a fundamental sense. The second operates on the reversal of the "materialist logic", subordinating social relations to relations of material production. The first is free from this logic. Baudrillard asks "if it is not the production of social relations that determines the mode of material production?" He then goes on to argue that a genealogy of social relations shows many criteria of domination other than the private ownership of means of production. Race, sex , age, and even language are all criteria of difference, of signification that are manipulated by the code. This utilitarian code, which hides behind the image of plurality and the attitude of negation is, I will argue, a state of

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<sup>61</sup> Baudrillard argues that while capitalism has, through the centuries, played on all the "superstructural" ideologies in order to let the steam out of economic contradictions, today the strategy is reversed. The system now plays on the economic reference ( well-being, consumption, but also working conditions, salaries, productivity, growth) as an alibi against the more serious subversion that threatens it. It is the economic sphere, with its partial contradictions that today acts as an ideological factor of integration. By making itself an accomplice of this diversion, Marxism is very simply exploited by capitalism as a force in ideological labor (spontaneous and benevolent). Everything that today gives priority to the economic field in salary claims or theorizing the economy as the last instance ( Seguy or Althusser) is "objectively" idealist and reactionary. The radical subversion is *transversal* to the extent that it crosses the contradictions connected with the mode of production, and *non-dialectical* to the extent that there is no dialectical negativity in the relation between a repressed, non-marked term and a marked term.

Ibid, p.139

'contained' negation. It is contained because it is allowed and directed only against certain paradigms, the collapse of which would help expand the operational domain of the code. In view of this argument, I propose an understanding of the discourse of "complexity and contradiction" as a 'contained revolution.'

In discussing the argument of "complexity and contradiction in architecture," I will treat Venturi's two books: *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1968), and *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), as two stages in the same theoretical project. I am not suggesting here that Venturi intended such a relation between his two books, rather I propose that a continuing line of argumentation can be traced in the two works. This line of argumentation, I argue, has been strongly misinterpreted by later day architects resulting in what we have called a state of 'complicit contradiction.'

In the first book Venturi forwards the argument that self-consciousness is necessarily a part of creation and criticism. "Architects today are too educated to be either primitive or totally spontaneous, and architecture is too complex to be approached with carefully maintained ignorance."<sup>62</sup> As such, the decision that architects make and the preferences they express are a function of the sensibilities of their times. Learning from Las Vegas, Venturi builds on the grounds he established in his first argument to call into question what he described as 'heroic' architecture. In insisting on its strong affiliation with 'high culture', this mode of architectural practice jeopardized its own potential by detaching itself from "people's architecture as

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<sup>62</sup> R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art ), 13.

people want it (and not as some architect decides Man needs it )."<sup>63</sup>

Going through a number of examples which illustrate the deficiency of a practice of architecture concerned with heroism, and detached from social context, Venturi constructs a position which rejects the heroic role of the architect and the utopian mission of architecture. He declares that the world cannot wait for the architect to build his or her utopia. In the main, the role of the architect and the mission of architecture should be concerned primarily and above all "with what is rather than what ought to be."

Yet, Venturi's assessment as to what *is*, drains this notion of any "revolutionary" potential. What *is*, is a "life-style that is fast, impatient, and composed of commodities of every kind, type, and size." What *is*, even off the highway, is the understanding that; "people have fun with architecture that reminds them of something else." Venturi endorses the *is* of simulation, and abolishes the *ought to be* of social responsibility. Limiting the goals of the latter to the task of creating that with which people have fun.

To have architecture rhyme with this new reality, Venturi finds himself compelled to reject all autonomy of the discipline of architecture. He attacks the modernists separation between art and architecture. Theorists of Modern architecture substantiated the argument of separation by focusing on space as an essential ingredient of architecture. Venturi attacks the notion of essentiality of space arguing that today's sensibilities are "bruised and impatient," thus declaring that today all reception

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<sup>63</sup> R. Venturi, *Learning From Las Vegas*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972 ), 160-161.

of architecture is "antispatal". Instead, he promotes an understanding of architecture as a system of communication through signs and symbols: "thus we declare the victory of symbols-in-space, over forms-in-space." And where are we to search for the meaning of symbols:"the iconography and mixed media of roadside commercial architecture will point the way, if we look."<sup>64</sup>

In calling for the architecture of complexity and contradiction, Venturi reduces the complexity of architectural ideology to the notion of communication as practiced in the realms of commerce and entertainment. The complexity of the architectural artifact as a construct and a process is reduced to its formal expression, and the quest for contradiction is aimed at replacing the 'high culture' aesthetic by that of a commercially oriented mass-culture. So far Venturi's position can be understood from the perspective of total affirmation characteristic of the American reception of Pop art. However, the notion of complicity arises when Venturi insists that such practice is possible within the domain of "high-design architects." He explains that "it [this practice] provides, together with the moral subversion through irony and the use of a joke to get to seriousness, the weapon of the artists of nonauthoritarian temperament in social situations that do not agree with them."<sup>65</sup>

In arguing for complexity and contradiction in architecture Venturi attacked the 'heroic' practice of architecture based on affiliation with 'high culture' only to replace it with a mode of 'conformist heroism' based on affiliation with mass culture. By calling for integration with social contexts, and an architecture sensitive to the fast changing conditions and bruised sensibilities

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<sup>64</sup>. Ibid, p.131

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.161

he unwittingly invites the commercially propagated attitudes of 'play' and 'entertainment' as paradigms for architecture, as can demonstrated by postmodern architectural practice (figs. 3 & 4 ).

Complexity and contradiction has been turned into a conformist ideology devoid of revolutionary merit. It is a manifestation, in the field of architecture, of the "affordable" revolution, of the ineffective hence false dialectic. Such a claim cannot be forwarded on the basis of the presented discussion without a fair degree of simplicity. A more articulate investigation of Venturi's thesis is required as well as an indepth investigation of the works that claim association to it. Yet, at this point I will content myself with having raised the issue.

## ART

With the opening of the first major public building by **Peter Eisenman**, theory and reality collide. **HERBERT MUSCHAMP** examines the results

I'VE ALWAYS HAD A SOFT SPOT FOR BIG PHONIES. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, that salon *savante*, was a childhood hero. I devoutly admire Frank Lloyd Wright not only for his prairie houses, but also for the dash with which he swirled those capes. And I think Peter Eisenman is a nifty architect and a swell guy.

So what if Eisenman's ideas are secondhand, imperfectly digested, and of dubious value to begin with? So what if this privately sweet-tempered fellow stalks onto the speaker's platform with a public persona that makes Morton Downey, Jr., seem mild? All the bullying, all the arcane, high-flown rhetoric only add to Eisenman's luster as a mountebank in the grand tradition. And even though I've been the target of his abuse on more than one public occasion, I'm grateful someone is carrying

has found his most receptive audience. Yet it is the opening, this month, of an academic building, Ohio State University's Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, that seems likely to secure wide public recognition of his work. Not coincidentally, the Max Protetch Gallery in New York is featuring an exhibition of drawings and models of four of Eisenman's projects, including the Wexner Center, from October 26 through December 2.

**For Eisenman,  
architecture is a  
game whose  
object is to break  
the rules**

Even inside the academy, few people know much about Eisenman's architecture except that it is legendarily difficult to understand. The difficulty may lie less with Eisenman than with the jargon used by those who write about him. To decipher it, you have to read through huge chunks of such French philosophers as Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Lacan, with perhaps a semester or two of Nietzsche and Heidegger for preparation.

Forget about it. All you need to know is that the post-structuralist ideology from which most of Eisenman's ideas spring was shaped by two pivotal events. The first was the 1968 student revolt in Paris, which shook the intellectuals of the prevailing structuralist school into adopting a less detached, less rational relationship to the cultural life of their times. The second was the speed with which Parisian life returned to normal after the revolt—without resolving the conflicts that caused it. In the view of these post-structuralists, contemporary life is in a condition of buried crisis; the world lurches on, operating on the basis of values and beliefs whose foundations long ago crumbled.

The post-structuralist response is to refuse to go along with all the techniques that smooth over the collapsed foundations. Crisis Thinkers don't want to invent a new system of thought; their strategy is to expose the bankruptcy on which conventional reality is built. It was inevitable that someone would try to translate this thinking into architecture, if only because of the verbal free association between *structuralism* and architectural structure.

For Peter Eisenman, architecture is a game whose object is to break the rules that ordinarily give buildings not only their forms but also their meaning. Ei- ▶ 274



The architect as hero: Peter Eisenman in front of part of the permanent "scaffolding" of his new Wexner Center on that colorful tradition.

This Big Phony now stands on the brink of a very real, big success. Best known for most of his career as an expounder of theories, Eisenman has lately, at the age of fifty-seven, begun to flourish as a maker of buildings. With projects recently completed in New York City and Berlin, Eisenman's reputation has already grown beyond the academic circles in which he

3. Article on the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts in Ohio by Peter Eisenman in which he describes architecture as: "a game whose object is to break the rules. The editor's note under the photograph of Eisenman reads: "the architect as hero." Vogue, October 1989.

## Design

## A Crazy Building in Columbus

Peter Eisenman, architecture's bad boy, finally hits his stride

BY KURT ANDERSEN

Peter Eisenman spent his 30s and 40s being the angriest, most intellectually convoluted, infuriating major architect in America, a really terrible enfant terrible. Both his insurmountable theoretical essays and his few buildings (four houses in two decades) seemed pretentious and willfully opaque, caricatures of neo-modernism. One Eisenman house had a column in the bedroom that precluded a bed, another a hole in the floor and a stairway that ran from the ceiling halfway down a wall. The architect used to say he would not dream of living in one of his houses ("Art and life are two different things").

But all that has changed. "I was a killer, a trained killer, and you can't keep that up," Eisenman, 57, says today. "Peter Eisenman is ultimately a friendlier person—kinder, gentler. People are going to like my buildings more." In fact, he suddenly has lots of plum commissions—an office building in Tokyo, a research complex at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, the Columbus convention center. Meanwhile, he will bank this week in the celebrations surrounding the dedication of his first major building, the \$43 million Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at the Ohio State University in Columbus.

For Wexner, Eisenman teamed up with the far more conventional Columbus architect Richard Trott ("I went in for the touchdown, and Dick was the blocking back who knocked guys over"). The building is certainly the best work of his career, an interior, almost out-of-control collage of materials and forms. "There's no question that this is my most completely realized building," he says. "In a sense it's my first building." He still would not want to live in any of the houses he's designed (his home is an 18th-century cottage in Princeton, N.J.), but the new building in Columbus is another matter. "I'd love to work in Wexner," Eisenman says.

As would anyone who does not mind being tricked and teased by the architecture at almost every turn. The new building (paid for mainly by O.S.U. alumni and Columbus-based retailer Leslie Wexner) may have been the perfect project for this hyperintellectualizing bad boy

to prove himself on: it was conceived by the university as both a museum and a seedbed for avant-garde art. From Anselm Kiefer paintings to Pina Bausch performances to a new video installation that displays images from the building's surveillance cameras. Did the university want a fin-de-siècle monument to erudite

chosen by the architects, is the 48-ft.-wide space between a tidy 1979 concrete cube of a social hall and a huge, Albert Speer-ish auditorium built in 1956. The new construction knits these chunky boxes into a tightly woven, slightly mad-looking but altogether sensible complex. The four soaring exhibition galleries, with a gridded glass ceiling and gridded glass wall, are lit by natural light.

But that does not mean the building is easy to understand or like. Running its whole, three-city-blocks length is a permanent, jungle gym-like white steel scaf-



Eisenman at Ohio State's Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, seen from the exterior, top, and inside the gallery, right: a fin-de-siècle monument to erudite monomania, inspired nervousness and the intriguing ironic gesture

monomania, inspired nervousness, the intriguing ironic gesture? Eisenman was the man for the job. "I get weepy that O.S.U. took this risk," he says. "It wasn't Harvard or Yale or Princeton. It's a great thing about America that people in Columbus, Ohio, are building this crazy building."

The Wexner Center is, appropriately, both grand and zany, yet unlike earlier Eisenman designs, it does not seem mean-spirited. And it works. The site, shrewdly

folding. The *faux* scaffold is inspired: it defines a long outdoor walkway, it plays tricks with perspective (Does the thing tilt up? Down? Are its beams parallel?), and its evocation of construction in progress makes the Wexner Center seem perpetually unfinished, excitingly open-ended.

Like all of Eisenman's work, the Wexner Center is an obsessive meditation on the grid, modernism's elemental unit. For starters, Eisenman has lined up the building with the Columbus city grid ruth-

4. Article on the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts in Ohio by Peter Eisenman in which Eisenman is described as the "bad boy" of architecture. This attitude on behalf of both the editor and the architect reinforce the argument that notion of "complexity and contradiction" can be understood to have become devoid of any critical or 'revolutionary' merit. Time, November 20, 1989.

### **'Pluralism' as Fashionable Stylization**

The notion of pluralism is a central constituent of the postmodern architectural discourse. It developed in view of the epistemological discourses which asserted the arbitrariness of knowledge, and render any and all premises questionable. Postmodernists built on this foundation by negating the exclusivity of any dogma or taste. In view of this position, all traditions seem to have some validity, and as such, no orthodoxy can be adopted without self consciousness and irony. The result is a state of incessant choosing, a restless quest for alternatives, and an inexhaustible appetite for experimentation with an attitude allegedly free from ideological biases, or "dogmas." Needless to say that in the absence of an ideologically defined norm, the practice of art as a critique is neutralized. Art becomes ideologically passive and ambiguous. The result is a situation in which "literally, anything goes," as Hal Foster puts it.<sup>66</sup> The result is a state of global homogeneity of meaning, or lack of meaning, despite the multiplicity of effects, devices and styles.

It is the conscious abstinence from any ideological affinity in the postmodern project, I would like to argue, that rendered it particularly susceptible to the ideology of monopoly capitalism, which quickly appropriated it into market mechanisms. To say it in even harsher terms, if we are to accept the argument that the decision to refrain from ideological affinity is itself an ideological position, then the ideology of postmodern architecture is "ideological prostitution." An idea which undoubtedly would appeal to Philip Johnson.

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<sup>66</sup> Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: a Preface," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend; Washington: Bay Press, 1983), ix-xvi



Baudrillard's discussion of the monopoly of the code provides an insightful understanding of the notion of pluralism as a constituent of the operative logic of marketing mechanism. Within the context of consumption, pluralism may be understood as the provision for the possibility of choice, thus hiding the dictatorship of the code, of monopoly capitalism. One is given the illusion of the freedom to choose from a variety of possible options, yet in the very act of presenting the possibilities a limiting action has already been enforced limiting one's range of possible choices to those presented. The dogma of imposing a particular choice has been replaced by that of choosing from a range of choices. The obligatory nature of the act of choice, remains intact. Within monopoly capitalism a manipulative mechanism operates providing the illusion of false choice to hide the totalitarian and dictatorship of the ideology.

The capitalist market mechanism created an aggressive state of competition leading to an unprecedented demand for image differentiation within the profession of architecture itself. Given the primacy of visibility in the aesthetics of advertising, this differentiation had to be achieved in the "formal" realm. Hence the rise of a new definition of style, style as "Trade Mark," or what I will call: **fashionable stylization**. This form of identification operates through a type of style that can be composed of an agglomeration of special features, compositional strategies, and graphic representation techniques.

The phenomenon of naming types of architecture at their inception is a sign of the depth to which marketing strategies have permeated the practice of architecture. According to the logic of marketing, names not only provide an identity but also legitimize and elevate the status of that which is named. "As soon as a manner of architecture can be named, it attains actuality

and credibility."<sup>67</sup> While the classification and assessment of aesthetic types was, up till a near past, the domain of the historian and critic, today, the architect himself names an aesthetic type even while it is being formulated.<sup>68</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that the presence of a relationship between 'style' and market dynamics is unique to the postmodern context. Rather, I would like to articulate those aspects of the relationship that are characteristic of this context.

For the benefit of establishing a manageable platform of discussion, I will start from a definition of what style may be understood to connote in the field of art and architecture. While there is no one definition that delivers the final word on the subject, I will adopt the definition put forward by Meyer Schapiro in his classic essay of 1952, where he defines style as: "above all a system of forms with a quality and meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of a group are visible."<sup>69</sup>

Let us now isolate and discuss the following components of the definition: the personality of the artist, meaningful expression, and finally the outlook of a group. The notion of the individuality of the artist is one that has received an exaggerated

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<sup>67</sup> Stephen Kieran, "The Architecture of Plenty: Theory and Design in the Marketing Age," in *The Harvard Architectural Review*, vol VI ( 1986 ), 103-113

<sup>68</sup> Tafuri argues that "the fact that specific design methods become outdated even before it is possible to verify their underlying hypotheses in reality," to be a sign of the decline of the architect's "professional" status, "and his introduction into programs where the ideological role of architecture is minimal."

M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, ( Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976 ), 178

<sup>69</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "Style," *Anthropology Today. An Encyclopedia Inventory*, , Alfred Louis Kroeber ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1953 ), 278-303.

emphasis in Romantic philosophies, and which refers to the personal expressions of individuals, upholding the glorification of the individual as creator. The particularity of the new condition is the emergence of media as the cultural qualifier of the merit of the individual creator:

"Today more than ever, any strategy of the "celebrity-artist" must recognize that unless the media record is engaged, history will forget ( and the potential patron will never have heard of) the architect. Persons who deal with one or another aspect of access to the media achieve importance. The specter which the media holds over the profession can be substantial."<sup>70</sup>

As for "meaningful expression", the argument can be forwarded that the media, in its omnipresence and rigorous infiltration into all aspects of life, come to play a primary role in both denoting and defining the meaning of expressions.<sup>71</sup> The role of media could be assessed through two manifestations. The first is the primacy of what Vincent Scully called "a pictorial sensibility."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Plunz and Kenneth L. Kaplan, On "Style," *PRECIS 5: Beyond Style*, ( Fall 1984 ), 34.

In their article, the authors cite two examples which illustrate the media's irreversible entanglement with career strategies. The first is Hitchcock and Johnson's *International Style* exhibition, and the second is the publication of *Five Architects*, in 1972, financed by the authors themselves as a collective method of entering the realm of media.

<sup>71</sup> This claim is made on the bases of Marshall McLuhan's proposal: "the medium is the message," as presented in *Understanding Media*. He claims that: "in a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message." He substantiates his argument by forwarding three arguments: The first is that the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The second is that just as electric light is a medium without a message, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name, so it is a fact that the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The third is that as electric speed further takes over the process of mechanical fragmentation, we are carried from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* ( New York: Mc Graw Hill Book Company, 1964 ), 23-35.

<sup>72</sup> Vincent Scully, "Doldrums in the Suburbs," *Journal of The Society of Architectural Historians*, XXIV, no.1 ( March 1965 ), 36-47.

This refers to the effect of the media sensibility on architectural practice resulting in the attitude of describing building- in the press and architectural exhibits- predominantly by photographs, rather than by plans, sections, perspectives, and the like. The definition of style was thus reduced to two basic components; excessive individuality to the point of narcissism, and the reduction of the meaning of the "system of forms" to the visual level. This resulted in the suppression of the role of program, and structure as determining components of the aesthetic experience.

The "outlook of the group", in so far as it can be understood as the program of the group in question, is by definition a complex project. This complexity stems from the fact that this outlook has simultaneously to cater for the group aspirations as well as make room for the individual variations. Moreover, this complexity results from the fact that for such "outlooks" to translate into styles, they will have to address and engage with active cultural systems. Cultural systems are complex situations by definition, and as such, require that such "outlooks" be aware of, and sensitive to this complexity.

As pertains to the field of architecture, it is credible to assume that the issue of establishing a relation with some form of patronage is a component of any architectural "outlook." The current situation exhibits a unique pattern of patronage. This uniqueness is a result of the sophisticated techniques of manipulation and the strong affinity of this patronage to a mass market place which in turn reduces style to a commodity.

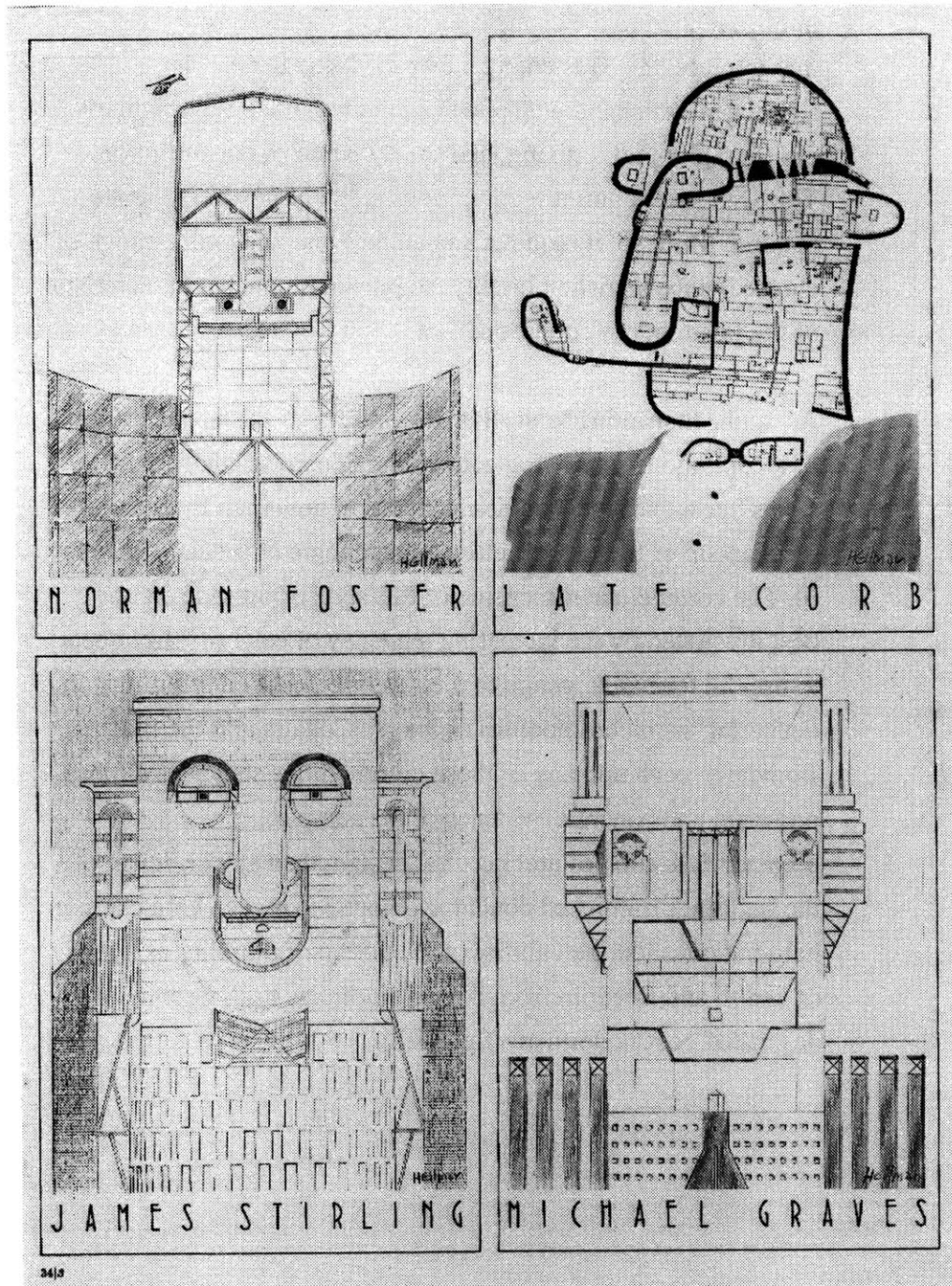
While stylistic choices have always been governed by the competition for commissions, today "a significant difference lies in the changing nature of the visual evidence of style, which is,

in turn, related to the changing nature of the stylistic marketplace."<sup>73</sup> This change, I would like to argue, is associated with the development of modern media- particularly photography-, advertising, and the dynamic of consumption. This dynamic requires a continuous sense of newness, hence fashion. More so, it requires a potentially inexhaustible range of choice, hence stylistic plurality, so presumptuously characteristic of the postmodern condition.

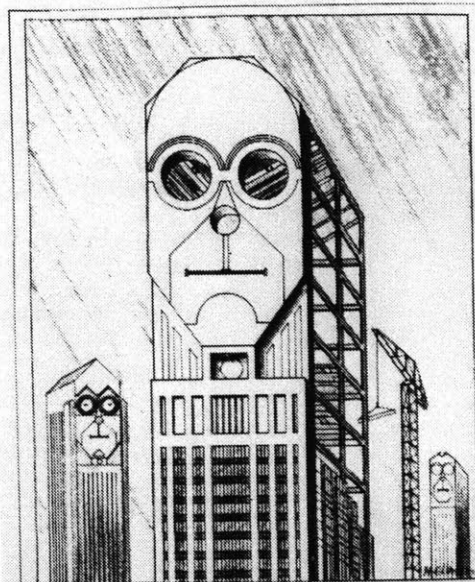
As such, **fashionable stylization**, refers to the proliferation of a continuously growing collection of "narcissistic formal styles" responding to a cultural situation governed by the mechanism of the market-place and the logic of media (fig. 5 & 6). The commercial dimension of this stylistic attitude can be best illustrated by the increasing tendency of celebrity architects to use the formal language of their most celebrated buildings in designing such commodities as tea pots, chairs and the like. Ironically, each and any of those commodities stands as a more powerful and concrete evidence of the complete commercialization of architectural design, than any criticism of the buildings mimicked could have hoped to reveal. One can not help but question the validity of the notion of plurality as a sign of health and freedom from dogma, for it has itself become the dogma of postmodernism (fig.7 &8).

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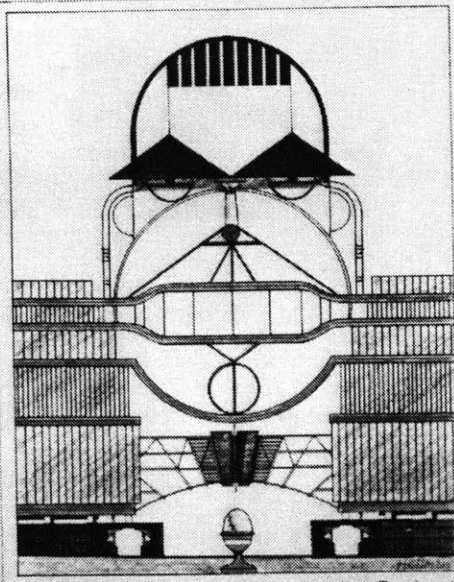
<sup>73</sup> Op.cit, Plunz and Kaplan, p.33



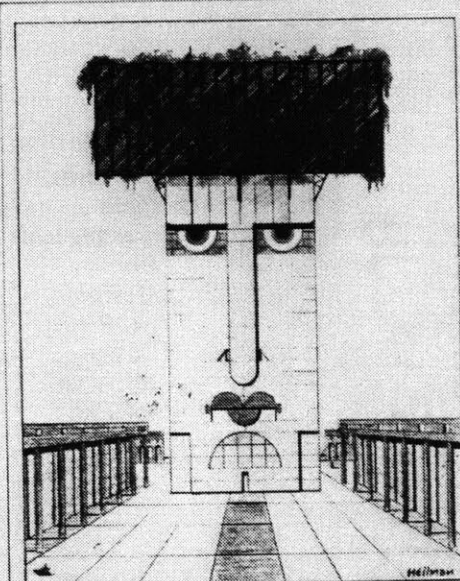
5. 'Archi-tête', by Louis Hellman, *Architectural Review*, March 1984.



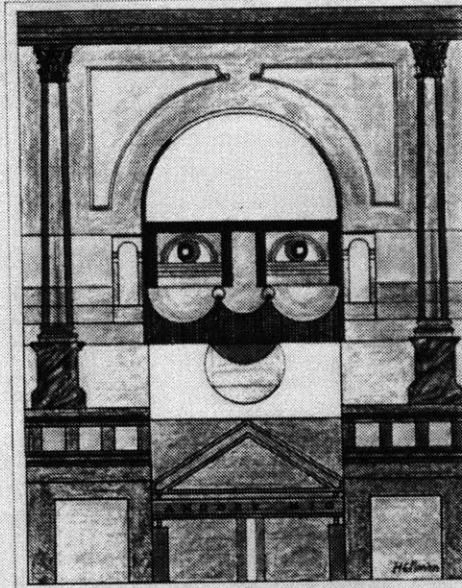
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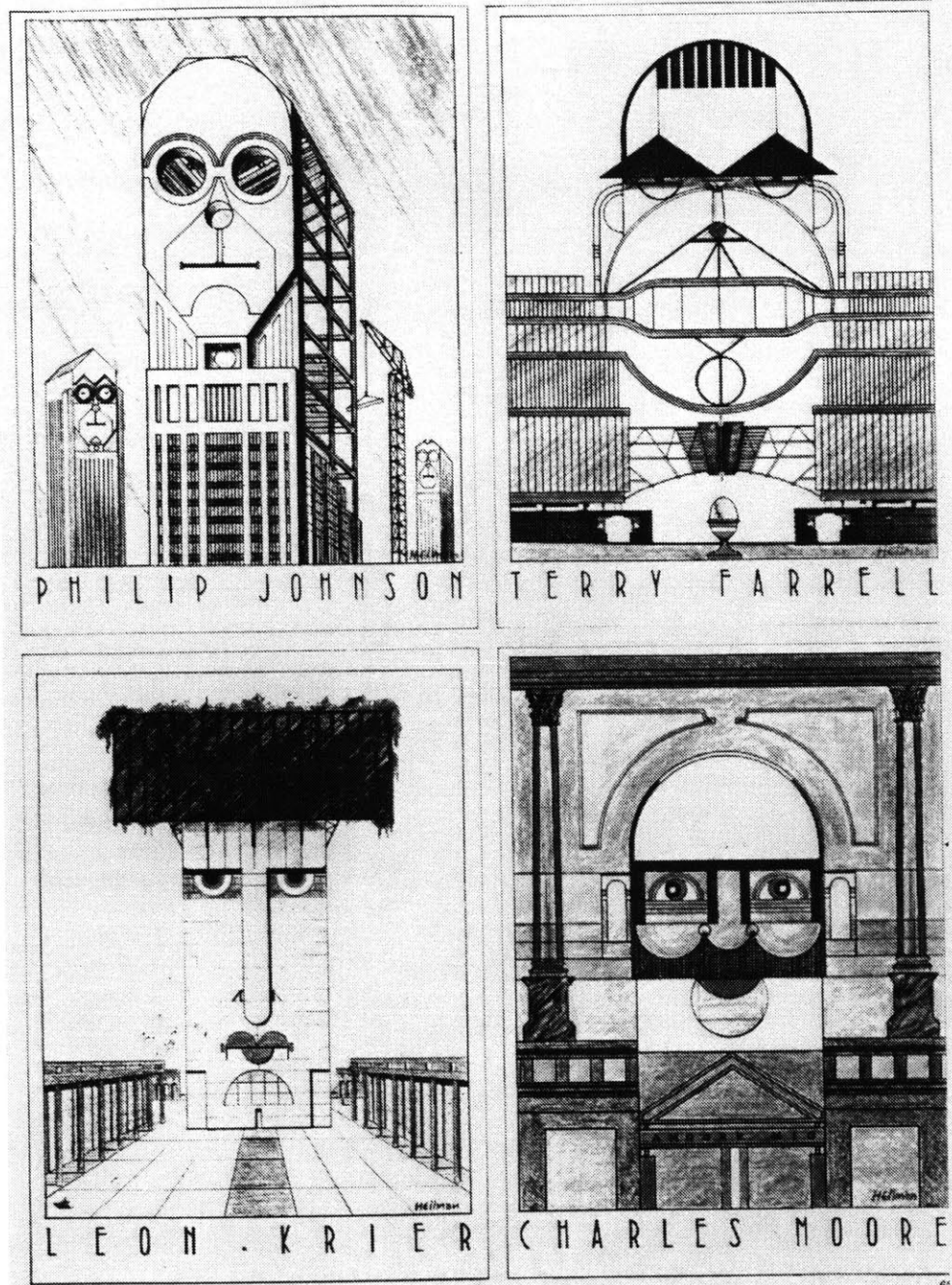
LEON KRIER



CHARLES MOORE

6. 'Archi-tête', by Louis Hellman, *Architectural Review*, August 1984.





6. 'Archî-tête', by Louis Hellman, *Architectural Review*, August 1984.



## The Architecture of Signs

In discussing Baudrillard's understanding of the nature of architectural experience, I would like to debate it in relation to two parallel positions, that of Walter Benjamin as articulated in "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"<sup>74</sup> and that of Robert Venturi as presented in *Learning from Las Vegas*. Taken as references of comparison, those positions will enlighten our understanding of Baudrillard's argument.

In the above mentioned essay, Benjamin argues that buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use (tactile), and by perception (visual). Visual contemplation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. Benjamin then moves on to claim that:

"As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value."<sup>75</sup>

The manner in which human sense perception is organized and the medium in which it is accomplished, Benjamin argues, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. Given the context of monopoly capitalism, where consumption is the principle habit, and media--particularly in the form of advertising --is the primary medium of communication, it follows that the nature of architectural appropriation will depend heavily on their rationale. In view of Baudrillard's

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<sup>74</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Video Culture*, John Hanhardt ed. ( New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986 ), 27-52.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.45

argument, this translates into the dominance of sign-exchange value and the primacy of visuality.

Indeed, Baudrillard explicitly argues that "today architecture has no effects which are proper to itself; instead it functions merely as an indicator of the transformation of the world."<sup>76</sup> He describes this transformation as extraordinarily rapid and fundamental. The age of electronic storage and retrieval systems has changed our conceptual, social, political and economic values. Ours is a flourishing era for simultaneous exchange between reality and fiction that fuse into everyday life. He describes perception of space as "mere sign". The sign is an agent that disrupts the balance between reality and illusion. Space is not experienced three-dimensionally in time; it has been substituted by its sign-exchange value.<sup>77</sup>

At this point, I would like to connect Baudrillard's argument to Venturi's description of the "anti-spatial" in architecture. Understanding perceptual habits to be a function of the cultural condition and its translation into a life style, he argues that today's lifestyle "is fast, impatient, and composed of commodities of every kind, type, and size."<sup>78</sup> This results in sensibilities that are "bruised, impatient, and bold." This, Venturi argues, necessitates the return to an architecture "of styles and signs." The architecture of signs communicates over space. Thus, communication dominates spatial experience, and produces environmental experience: "we thus declare the victory of the symbols-in-space, over forms-in-space in Las Vegas."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> J. Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* ( Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney Press, 1988 ), 53-54.

<sup>77</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," *Video Culture*, John Hanhardt ed., ( New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986 ), 124-143.

<sup>78</sup> R. Venturi, *Learning From Las Vegas* ( Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972 ), 116.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.85

While both arguments, Venturi's and Baudrillard, share common grounds, they nevertheless differ in their understanding of the mechanism of signification. Venturi insists on the notion of "explicit association," and as such ties the sign to a meaning, the signifier to a signified. Baudrillard, on the other hand, dispenses with the notion of explicit association, arguing that it is no longer operational in the context of simulation which involves the manipulatory play of signs without meaning."<sup>80</sup> In this new mode of signification, the meaning, or rather 'meaning-effect', stems from the play of the signs, and not solely from an inherent meaning in the sign itself. Translated in terms of the experience of architecture this suggests that the meaning of a given architectural composition is not the sum total of the meaning of the individual components or elements, but rather the meaning that stems from the composition itself. The same set of architectural elements can produce different meanings, or "meaning-effects," depending on the mode of composition. While this may be argued to have always been true, nevertheless, the degree of the dependability of the meaning-effect on the composition proposed in Baudrillard's argument is not.

By disposing of the notion of explicit-association, Baudrillard frees the sign and the mechanism of sign-exchange value from the predicament of acquiring architecturally specific meaning. The meaning-effect of the architectural experience is no more contained within an autonomous context of architectural aesthetics. Under the impact of mass media and the primacy of visuality the "meaning-effect" of architecture is translated to the

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<sup>80</sup> J. Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence," *October*, no.20 ( Spring 1982 ), 6.

realm of commodity aesthetics. Hence his declaration that:

"Today, architecture has no effects which are proper to itself."

Baudrillard's conclusion is based on a misunderstanding, or an act of deliberate manipulation, of the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign as presented in the Saussurian model of structural semiotics. In describing the relation between the signifier and the signified as arbitrary Saussure explains that "the arbitrary nature of the sign means that the **bond** between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary." He goes on to stress that "the term arbitrary should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker, but rather that it actually has no natural connection to the signifier."<sup>81</sup> In his analysis of the linguistic sign, Saussure establishes two distinct yet interdependent agents which define the formation of the sign: the social forces and time. Social forces encourage the perpetuation of linguistic signs, while time refers to their change. "The sign is exposed to alteration because it perpetuates itself. That is why the principle of change is based on the principle of continuity, it implies varying degrees of shifts in the relationship between the signified and the signifier."<sup>82</sup> This understanding of the sign contradicts the argument of total arbitrariness and the complete loss of inherent meaning. Instead, and in view of Baudrillard's notion of simulation, I propose that we understand the new situation as one in which there came to be a substantial expansion in the field of potential meaning that a sign can evoke. This expansion is a result of the change in the values of cultural systems instigated by capitalist ideology and enforced by the rigorous and continuous impact of media.

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<sup>81</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959), 65.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.78.

As it pertains to the field of architecture, Stanford Anderson describes architectural forms to be "neither fully determined" by, nor "fully determining" the cultural systems they are embedded in and, the material conditions to which they relate.<sup>83</sup> Forms do not have predetermined meanings. Instead, a form is potentially capable of conveying a range of meanings. The meaning that a form conveys is determined by the specific context within which it operates; cultural system, material conditions. In their capacity to operate along those lines, architectural forms can be understood to lend themselves to the logic of structural semiotics. As such, the argument of the expanded field of potential meaning can be carried over to the realm of architecture.

Under the legitimacy of notions of eclecticism, plurality and negation, within the polemic of postmodern architecture, forms came to convey new meanings and to constitute new relations. Baudrillard's notion of the "meaning-effect" can be understood, within the realm of architecture, to result from those new and unconventional meanings and meaning relation which postmodern architecture exhibits. They are referred to as "meaning-effect" not because they are not proper to architecture itself as Baudrillard claims, but because, as it stands today, they operate outside the conventional or established discourse of architecture. This is to say that if the established discourse and main stream production grows to accept those attitudes, then their hyperreal dimension, their simulating capacity, so to speak, will disappear.

Having pushed the argument so far, I would like to forward the position that, in compliance with the argument of the quasi-autonomy of form, one cannot accept the argument that

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<sup>83</sup> S. Anderson, "Type and Convention. . .," p. 109.

architecture has, or will, reach a state where it will no longer have effects which are proper to itself. Nor, for this matter, that the role of architecture can be reduced to the production of effects - in the sense of media effects. Building on the argument that "rarely does a form achieve, or achieve only that which was intended,"<sup>84</sup> it will be difficult to produce, even with the strongest of complicit intentions, architecture which is solely concerned with the euphoria of mass media. This is not to say that architecture may not be designed so as to best produce particular effects within a given context, addressing the user's sensibilities and values. Its capacity to do so, should by no means be misread as limiting the possible range of effects and meanings that it is capable of producing.

In an age characterized by the rise of "visual pleasure", architecture has increasingly become one more medium for the creation of sensation. What postmodernism has done is to deposit the totality of architectural experience in the realm of sensation, rather than in what is beyond this sensation.

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<sup>84</sup> S. Anderson, "Critical Conventionalism," P. 45.

## Architecture as Spectacle: Consumer 'Gestalt'

In a context where cultural values are those of bohemian<sup>85</sup> consumption and leisure instigated by a mode of capitalism whose appetite for profit grows by the day; and in which sensibilities are bruised, impatient, and fragmented under the influence of an ever more aggressive media technology, what position does architecture assume? I would like to argue that postmodern architecture assumes a position of complicit alliance to the "hegemony of the code." By surrendering to the logic of monopoly capitalism and in accommodating to its influence, consumer society preaches and practices architecture as "spectacle".

The meaning of the term 'spectacle' as used in contemporary discourse originated in the work of the Situationist International.<sup>86</sup> In their work, the situationists used the concept of the spectacle to describe a historical socio-economic process designating the alienation of late capitalism, which manifests itself in the total command of the commodity over social life: "The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained 'total occupation' of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> I use the term 'bohemian' to connote free-and-easy habits, manners, and morals as explained in *Oxford American Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>86</sup> The Situationist International (SI) remained from its inception intentionally underground, explicitly denied its own status as a movement, and resisted the art-world canonization suffered by earlier avant-garde movements such as dada. Nonetheless the Situationists achieved cult status in Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s as a result of the part they played in the events of 1967 and 1968 in France. Since then there has been a widespread diffusion of their ideas about society, art, and the relation between the two. For more information about this group, the reader is invited to consult: Elisabeth Sussman, *on the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957-1973*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Institute of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1989 ).

<sup>87</sup> Guy Debord, *Situationists International: 1957-1972*, p.8

The spectacle experience is an alienated one. It is that of the construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into "superior passionate quality." The sense of alienation stems from the suppression of use-value, to the benefit of the sign-exchange value, and the absence of concern or awareness of such suppression under the impact of the "ambiance." An ambiance that lures into "reception in a state of distraction." Distraction is meant here not in the sense of the inability to appropriate the work in question, as this, Benjamin argues, can be overcome by the force of habit. Rather, distraction implies an inability to penetrate through the spectacular ambiance, to discover the suppression of use-value.<sup>88</sup>

The spectacle state of a building can be understood as an acute case of what Alan Colquhoun describes as "the power of all artifacts to become icons, no matter whether or not they were specifically created for this purpose."<sup>89</sup> Arguing against the deterministic positions assumed by those modernists who preached an aesthetic of architectural form as a result of "scientific methods of analysis, "free of any conscious interference of the designer, Colquhoun states that: "artifacts have not only a 'use' value in the crudest sense, but also an 'exchange value'."<sup>90</sup> Based on this position, he advances the argument that our sense of place and relationship, "say in an urban environment or in a building," are not dependent on any objective fact that is measurable, "but are rather phenomenal in

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<sup>88</sup> Debord and Baudrillard both argue that the spectacle is an unconscious condition. One is completely consumed in this state: "the world one sees is its world."

<sup>89</sup> A. Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," *Essays in Architectural Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 45.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.43



nature."<sup>91</sup> The purpose of the aesthetic organization of our environment is to capitalize on this subjective schematization and make it socially available. The resulting organization is an artificial construct which *represents* these facts in a socially recognizable way. "We must look upon the aesthetic and iconic qualities of artifacts as being due, not so much to an inherent property, but to a sort of availability or redundancy in them in relation to human feeling."<sup>92</sup>

While arguing for the importance of the representational dimension in the making of the architectural artifact, what he calls the socially recognizable "exchange value," Colquhoun does not neglect the importance of the programmatic dimension, the "use value." Rather, his argument aims at undermining the credibility of understanding the aesthetic qualities of the architectural product as an objective methodological translation of "use value."

Colquhoun's point is well taken. Nevertheless, his use of the term "exchange-value" is not free of inaccuracy. The term "exchange-value" denotes an economic logic of exchange. The "socially recognizable value" that Colquhoun discusses operates within a symbolic mode of exchange, and as such should be referred to as sign-exchange value.

In view of the above presented discussion, I move to define the 'spectacle' as that situation, or artifact, characterized by a strong suppression of the programmatic dimension, in favour of a

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<sup>91</sup> Colquhoun does not specify what he means by the term "phenomenal". Yet, it can be deduced from the text that he uses the term in relation to the theory of phenomenalism as propounded by J.S. Mill which argues that material things are 'permanent possibilities of sensation.

*The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, revised edition, ( New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.43-4

deliberate amplification of aesthetic considerations. In other words, the primacy of "sign-exchange value" over "use value" achieved by capitalizing on the "availability" or "redundancy" of the aesthetic qualities that are "socially recognizable." The 'spectacle building' presents itself as an agglomeration of signs, animated by the energy of simulation generated by unorthodox relations and formal compositions; by an attitude of "complexity and contradiction", to use a term too familiar by now.

The value that governs the search for those relations and formal expressions is not that of 'morality' as was the case in the age of humanist discourse, nor that of 'scientific determinism' which prevailed in the early days of an industrial revolution. Rather, it is one of a different tone altogether. In describing the evolution in consumer aesthetics, Baudrillard argues that progressive (or rather aggressive) marketing has rendered the famous slogan "ugliness doesn't sell," as outmoded. Instead, it is replaced by: **"The beauty of the surroundings is the precondition for happy life."**<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>J. Baudrillard, "Consumer society," *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed., (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 36.

## **The Museum: Spectacle House of Art**



## From 'Institutional Art' to Mass Culture

For over a century the museum has been the most prestigious and authoritative place for seeing works of art. For most people in contemporary Western societies, the very notion of art itself is inconceivable without the museum. Yet, today it is argued that the museum's primary function is ideological. It represents, through its form and content, society's most revered belief and values<sup>94</sup>. This growth in the cultural significance of the museum has often been measured in direct proportion to disillusionment with religion and government in post-industrial western societies. In the course of gaining increasing cultural significance, the museum, as an institution, underwent successive redefinitions. This operation was linked to the evolution in the redefinition of the concept of "culture," and in a more direct manner to the change in the definition and significance of art.

According to Raymond Williams, the word "culture" belongs to a group of words--together with "class," "industry," "democracy," and "art"-- which were either invented or given new meaning after the Industrial Revolution. Under the impact of the industrial revolution the term "culture" shifted from connoting a set of 'autonomous' and 'elite' values to connoting relativist, mass-shared values, often described as mass culture. The latter is understood to be strongly related to the values of the market - place and heavily bombarded by the media. In order to provide a

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<sup>94</sup> Duncan and Wallach argue that in common with ancient ceremonial monuments, museums embody and make visible the ideas of the state. A notion, they argue, that has been commonly implied by the use of Roman-derived architectural rhetoric in the architecture of the museum; "thus asserting its descent from the ideological, historical, and political reality of imperial Rome." This notion is enforced by the location of museums in the center of modern cities; "like a temple facing an open forum," or as part of the municipal park complex as is commonly the case in the United States. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History*, no.3 (Dec.1980): 449-469.

schematic history of the evolution in the ideological discourse of the museum I would like to examine the parallel shifts in the arts and art historical discourse.

In its origin, the museum is a creation of bourgeois cultural logic. Its very presence was to affirm the bourgeois notion of the high culture, which adopted a position of separation between art and life. The early museums built in 18th century Europe were intended to be used by "learned and studious men." Yet, by the end of the 19th century, the increasingly categorical separation of art from life and reality-- and the insistence on the autonomy of art, which had once freed this very art from the fetters of church and state-- had pushed art and the artists to the margins of society. The bridging of this ever widening gap, was to become the project of the avant-garde art movements, who aimed at destroying "institutional art".<sup>95</sup> In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Burger argues that the major goal of art movements such as Dada, Surrealism, and the Post-1917 Russian avant-garde was the reintegration of art into life praxis, closing the gap separating art from reality. In so doing, they put forward a number of theses which attempted to conceptualize and put into practice the radical transformation of the conditions of producing, distributing, and consuming art.

By destroying "institutional art," the avant-garde exerted pressure on the museum as an institution. The pressure resulted in the evolution of a new typology of museums, defined as the museums of modern art, of which the Museum Of Modern Art in New York was a pioneering example. Not only did this museum differ from the "institutional" type in terms of the nature of the art

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<sup>95</sup> "Institutional art," is a term used by Peter Burger to refer to the institutional framework in which art was produced, distributed, and received in bourgeois society. A framework which rested on Kant's and Schiller's aesthetic of the necessary autonomy of all artistic creation.

exhibited, but also in the attitude towards art, which translated in new installation techniques, and redefined the nature of the museum experience.

Yet Burger argues that the avant-garde project failed to overthrow "institutional art," and fell instead into a dialectical relation with it.<sup>96</sup> The failure of the avant-garde project resulted from its trust that capitalism's power to modernize would eventually lead to its breakdown. This belief was rooted in a theory of economic crisis and revolution which, by the 1930s had already become obsolete. Andreas Huyssen, in *After The Great Divide*, argues that the collapse of "institutional art," and along with it the avant-garde project, which played as its dialectical opposite, was instigated by the arrival of culture industry and the rise of mass culture. "It was the culture industry, not the avant-garde, which succeeded in transforming everyday life in the 20th century."<sup>97</sup> He describes culture industry as the result of a fundamental transformation in the "superstructure" of capitalist societies: "This transformation, completed with the stage of monopoly capitalism, reaches so deep that the Marxian separation of economy and culture as a base and superstructure is itself called into question. Twentieth century capitalism has unified economy and culture by subsuming the cultural under the economic, by reorganizing the body of cultural meanings and symbolic significations to fit the logic of the commodity."<sup>98</sup> Describing the situation in Marxian terms he explains:

"The more inexorably the principle of exchange value cheats human beings out of use-value, the more successfully it manages to disguise itself as the ultimate object of enjoyment. Just as art works become commodities and are

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<sup>96</sup> This new dialectic relation deformed the avant-garde project by presenting it as a variation on, rather than the negation of, 'institutional art' which by then had been disguised under the banner of modernism.

<sup>97</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After The Great Divide*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press): 15

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 21

enjoyed as such, the commodity itself in consumer society has become image, representation, spectacle. Use-value has been replaced by packaging and advertising."<sup>99</sup>

In agreement with Baudrillard's thesis, he describes culture industry as an instrument whose sole purpose is social control. This control is covered under the "veil of entertainment." The commodification of art, along with the consumer nature of mass culture forced an attitude of commercialization on the museums. Not only were the museums receiving an increasingly larger number of visitors which transformed them to "museums-cum-rush-hour-subways,"<sup>100</sup> but also the masses came in to be entertained. To this end, museums added shops, cafes, restaurants, and gift sales centers which adopted high-pressure merchandising strategies analogous to shopping malls. The situation changed from one in which the credibility of the museum was a function of its collection, to one in which the number of visitors became the most significant criterion of success.<sup>101</sup>

To understand the transformation in the significance and administrative logic of museums instigated by the advent of capitalism, is by no means a simple project. It serves the purpose of this study that we concentrate, in understanding this change, on the relation between the change in the status of the work of art and the nature of the museum experience.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>100</sup> Michael Conforti, "Museum Blockbusters: Hoving's Legacy Reconsidered," *Art in America* (June 1986): 19-23.

<sup>101</sup> The situation became particularly disturbing in the United States in view of the primary role private and corporate endowment plays in supporting museums and cultural centers.



## The Work of Art and the Museum Experience

The museum experience has usually been described as a ritualistic one. By performing the ritual of walking through the museum, the visitor is prompted to enact and thereby to internalize the values and beliefs written into the museological script. This script is written by the selection and arrangement of works of art within a sequence of spaces, creating a totality. "The totality of art and architectural form organizes the visitor's experience as a script organizes a performance."<sup>102</sup>

In view of the above analysis, I propose three different ideological positions in relation to art, each of which had particular ramifications on the nature of the museum experience. The first is the position of "institutional art," as upheld by bourgeois culture. The second is the art of the avant-garde, which aimed at displacing "institutional art," and bridging the gap between art and everyday life. The third is art as commodity, which is operative in mass culture, as a result of the culture industry and the project of total consumption under monopoly capitalism. While no strict historical order of evolution is suggested here, nevertheless, I would like to emphasize the dominance of the third position in the postmodern condition, the consumer society.

According to the first position, that of institutional or high art, the relation of the viewer to the work of art is described in terms of aesthetic contemplation. This brought about the understanding that museums should sanction the idea that works of art are best viewed one-by-one, and that collections of art should be exhibited in homogeneous groups. This position also brought

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<sup>102</sup> Duncan and Wallach, "The universal Survey Museum," *Art History*, vol.3 no.4 (Dec.1980): 448-469.

about the belief that the museum space should be supplementary to the art object. Linda Nochlin describes the museum from this perspective as "a Good Mother: sheltering, permissive, undemanding and, above all self-obliterating."<sup>103</sup> The architectural space must remain invisible and be experienced only as a transparent medium through which art can be viewed objectively and without distraction. Formal neutrality and ahistoricity are considered vital components of the aesthetic experience of the architecture of the museum.

The second position aspired to an interactive relation between art and the viewer. El Lissitzky's *Cabinet of Abstract Art* serves as an illustration of the type of experience sought after by the avant-garde. Designed to defy the traditional contemplative behavior in front of a work of art, the installation techniques utilized in Lissitzky's cabinets created a state of complete integration between exhibition and space. In his article "From Factura to Factography," Benjamin Buchloh describes the manner in which: "The vertical lattice relief-construction that covers the display surfaces of the cabinet and that changes value from white, through gray, to black according to the viewer's position clearly engages the viewer in an [active] phenomenological exercise."<sup>104</sup> In the late 20s, in a retrospective analysis of his 'Demonstration Rooms,' Lissitzky wrote:

". . . Traditionally, the viewer was lulled into passivity by the painting on the walls. Our construction/design shall make the man active. This is the function of our room. . . With each movement of the viewer in space the perception of the wall changes; what was white becomes black, and vice versa. Thus , as a result of the human bodily motion, a perceptual dynamic is

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<sup>103</sup> Linda Nochlin, "The Musée d'Orsay: a Symposium," *Art in America* (January 1988): 82-106.

<sup>104</sup> B. Buchloh, "From Factura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (fall 1984): 85.

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achieved. This play makes the viewer active. . . The viewer is physically engaged in an interaction with the object on display."<sup>105</sup>

While prescribing a radically different form of relation between the work of art and the space that houses it, this position still shares a central notion with the position of contemplation. Both assume a relationship between the viewer and the work of art based on 'use-value'. The work of art is indeed believed to contain a genuine value particular to itself. Yet, contemporary studies show that the average visitor comes to the museum with no fixed purpose or perspective and usually looks over the entire collection rather than focusing on individual works. One curator estimated that the average visitor devotes 1.6 seconds to each of the works he or she looks at.<sup>106</sup> Clearly such behavior defies the logic of the two positions discussed. Therefore, I propose that we understand it as symptomatic of a new relation between the viewer and the work of art characteristic of the third position, art as commodity.

The position of art as commodity assumes the total collapse of art into the domain of the commodity. As such both the aesthetic experience with which the consumer/viewer engages the work of art, and the value he associates with it are derivatives of the 'discourse' of consumption.

This collapse is instigated, and further facilitated by a number of factors. The effect of technology is perhaps the most influential of those factors, and is felt through two avenues. The first is what Benjamin describes as the loss of the 'aura' of the work of art in view of the technical ability of reproduction. The second, is the emergence of new forms of artistic practices which are

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, pp. 86-7

<sup>106</sup> Micheal Compton, in a presentation at the symposium of museum curators in "Validating Modern Art," *Art Forum* (Jan. 1977): 52.

heavily dependent on technology, and which found their fulfillment in such practices as photography, film, and the mass media in general. In this new 'pluralistic' context, fine art is regarded as simply one kind of cultural activity among many others. The cultural experience of art is neither better nor worse than that offered by the mass media. Thus, the hierarchical conception of human culture in which the fine arts occupy the apex is denied. It is polemical that the very technology that brought about those new forms and freed the artistic experience from the confines of "institutional art" has itself been instrumental in the creation of manipulative culture industry. As such, these new forms were born captive of the logic of social control.

To understand the nature of the relation between art as commodity and the museum, one will have to start by asking the question: What are the experiential characteristics of commodity aesthetics? The answer, Huyssen declares, is that the aesthetic itself is identified with habits of enjoyment and pleasure produced quite concretely within the omnipresent apparatus of commercial entertainment. In view of Haug's definition of the "aesthetic space," the aesthetic experience can be described as totally embedded in the morality, or immorality, of consumption.<sup>107</sup>

The morality that now climatizes the aesthetic space is not a critical morality as the avant-garde hoped to instigate, rather it is an affirmative and conformist one encouraging an aesthetic

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<sup>107</sup> In "Towards the Dialectics of the Aesthetic," Wolfgang Haug argues that: "The aesthetic space stands out from the beginning in that it represents the chance to remain free of morality. At least the pressure of morality can be continually pushed back. Certainly, morality will maintain its pressure just as constantly by attempting to colonize the aesthetic space for itself. It can thereby refer back to a long tradition of the good-beautiful. Nevertheless, the aesthetic competence is delimited from the morality, expressly." Fritz Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology and Culture* (New York: International General, 1987): 131-179.

In disagreement with his argument, I propose that in the age of monopoly capitalism the aesthetic space of the consumer society has no resistance to morality, due to the totalitarian nature of the ideological discourse of late capitalism. As such it by necessity will have to be occupied by the morality of consumption, in Baudrillard's sense.

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experience in which criticism and enjoyment - to use Benjamin's terminology collapse into each other.<sup>108</sup>

The aesthetic reception of the work of art is governed by the laws of display and profusion, as characteristic of the commercial environments of the shopping mall. Baudrillard describes profusion as "more than the sum of its products." It is the very feeling of abundance and affluence that comes from accumulation. Central to this notion is the avoidance of quantitative centralization and categorization, thus allowing for the possibility of idle exploration, assuming no utilitarian approach to consumption. This quality, I would like to argue, is particularly important in the context of the museum, where the utilitarian dimension of the experience of consumption is, as a premise, not applicable.

The notion of display translates into the grouping of objects in collections, thus suppressing the individual value of the object. "The relation of the consumer to the object consequently changes: the object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning.... The consumer will be caught up in a *calculus* of objects, which is

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<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Haug advances an interesting thesis arguing that the work of art and the notion of the commodity are integral to each other: "Above all, the work of art as such arises only if there is a market, if the private form of appropriation, called buying, is developed. Only then are aesthetic objects as such able to acquire a unique new kind of use value, the artistic or aesthetic, and to emancipate themselves as such from other use forms, above all, from the cultic. Although the work of art according to our spontaneous assumption is something that is opposed to commerce, we owe it to commerce." Up to this point, his argument seems to call into question our argument of the collapse of the work of art into the commodity form, as a manifestation of a particular historical condition. Yet he goes on to affirm the fact that this relation gave birth to 'commodity aesthetics': "Commerce calls the aesthetic as commodity to the agenda, after the aesthetics of the commodity, commodity aesthetics, the first-born twin art has already appeared."

Fritz Wolfgang Haug, "Towards the Dialectic of the Aesthetics," *Commodity aesthetics, Ideology and Culture* (New York: International General, 1987): 131-170.

quite different from the frenzy of purchasing and possession which arises from the simple profusion of commodities."<sup>109</sup>

A striking similarity exists between what Baudrillard describes as "the descriptive feature" of the consumption environment, and the curator's comments on the visitor's behavior in the museum.

*Museum as 'spectacle.'*

In defining the museum as spectacle, we describe a script in which the work of art is completely subordinated by the aesthetics of the architectural environment. More over, this environment presents the work of art as a commodity through the strategies of profusion and display, and the increasing tendency to incorporate mass media installations. The museum is a spectacle insofar as its aesthetic ambiance --sign exchange value--overpowers its function as exhibition space-use value, in so far as its exhibitionist attitude corrupts its attitude towards exhibition.

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<sup>109</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Consumer Society," p. 31-32

### Case Studies: Plateau *Parisian*

The theoretical hypothesis presented in this study gains strength in relation to the number and variety of cases tested. Yet, in an attempt to define a manageable field of investigation the number of case studies to be investigated will be narrowed to two. Building on the premise that: "Forms , while neither fully determined nor determining, are both embedded in cultural systems and related to material conditions," the need arises to define the scale of the cultural system to be engaged. The theoretical argument presented addresses late capitalist societies as the general field of investigation. The question thus arises as to the merit of being sensitive to the particularity of the different societies covered under such a global term as "late capitalist." In view of the fact that our theoretical proposition is developed in relation to Jean Baudrillard's thesis on consumption, it conforms to common wisdom that we start by testing the hypothesis at 'home'.

Paris, the inspiration of Baudelaire and the "illumination" behind Walter Benjamin's Arcades project, was considered the unchallenged capital of art in the nineteenth century, a claim which the French are working hard to maintain through the twentieth century as well. The number of museums constructed or renovated in Paris after world war two surpasses that undertaken in any other city in the Western world, thus transforming Paris to a museum of museums. This phenomenon stems from the particular glamour the term "culture" has in the French context, as well as the inextricable bond between culture and politics in France. "In France," Colquhoun argues, "it seems, the very abstractness of the word 'culture' invests it with

irresistible authority."<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the tradition of state patronage endows the museum's capacity for cultural representation with official dimension.

Beaubourg has been claimed the most monumental and progressive state-sponsored project dedicated to the cultural benefit of the masses. It is rarely discussed without a political tone. Fifteen years later, the French political system presents the society with another mass oriented cultural project; the Musée d'Orsay. The two projects exhibit strongly notions of difference, to the extent that they were described as antithetical by the French press. I would like to present the argument that underneath the differing formal expressions, the two projects share the same ideology; that of addressing a consumer society, and catering for a media-oriented culture.

Finally, for those who would still be skeptical of the validity of our critical inquiry outside the context of France, I would like to forward the observation that the three architects responsible for the designs of the museums under examination come from Italy and England-- a fact that speaks for itself.

The assessment of the experience in the museums will depend primarily on second hand knowledge of the building as described in architectural publications. In examining the museums, I will be looking for qualities and characteristics, formal and programmatic, that will support the definition of consumption proposed. The model of operative criticism, adopted in the course of the study, is one "which is not primarily interested in the architectural "object," but in the global context that conditions its configuration."<sup>111</sup>

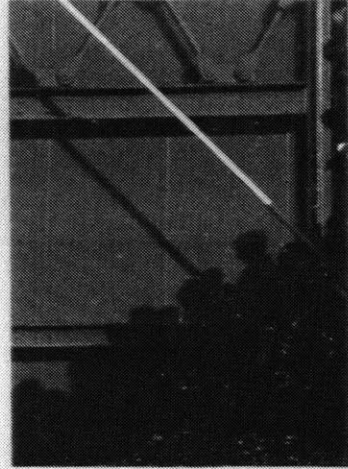
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<sup>110</sup> A. Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985): 110.

<sup>111</sup> Tafuri, *History and . . .* p. 153.



# **Le Centre Georges Pompidou**



31 janvier 1977, Inauguration officielle du  
Centre Georges Pompidou.



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Is Beaubourg a museum? Does it belong to the field of critical investigation assumed by this study? I argue that it is, and consequently that it does belong to the critical field.

Beaubourg, right from the issuing of the competition brief, was conceived by many to promise a break from the conventional 'museum' type. This belief was further supported by the claims of enthusiastic 'liberal' government officials. Yet, the fact remains that in a number of interviews conducted with them upon winning the competition, Piano and Rogers explicitly referred to it as "the museum".<sup>112</sup> Although they proposed a new understanding of the relation between their building and the public, they nevertheless conceived of their building through the museum typology: "with this museum building. . . we want to help as much as we can the creation of a new world culture."<sup>113</sup>

Their 'new vision' for the role of the museum received official support by the jury's decision as expressed by Claude Mollard, the chief administrator of the center, in his statement that Beaubourg represents "the meeting of the taste and preoccupations of a president and the aspirations of the French people."<sup>114</sup> The question arises as to what type of a culture is being represented by Beaubourg.

Piano explains that in conceiving of the building, he and Rogers had to choose between two different concepts of culture: "either institutional, esoteric, intimidating, or something unofficial,

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<sup>112</sup> Refer to "Piano+Rogers; Centre Beaubourg," *Architectural Design*, vol.42 (July 1972): 407-411; also "Paris Contemporary Arts Centre: Winning Scheme," *The Architect's Journal*, vol 154, (July 1971): 182-183.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Rawstorne, "Piano+Rogers, Centre Beaubourg," *Architectural Design*, vol.42, (July 1972): 407-411.

<sup>114</sup> Claude Mollard, *L'enjeu du Center George Pompidou*, Paris, 1976

latter."<sup>115</sup> They go on to present the argument that contemporary societies are characterized by a state of continuous and dynamic change;

"Things change all the time anyway. Houses, factories, today become museums tomorrow. Maybe one day our museum might become a foodstore, a supermarket."<sup>116</sup>

The allusion to the consumer society is too obvious to miss. The argument that today's houses and factories may change into tomorrow's museums operates along a logic that is more related to the notion of fashion, rather than to the notion of technological development. It is more probable that technological development would change the house and the museum into a factory rather than changing the factory and house into a museum. Moreover, to speculate that their museum will change into a "supermarket" is to conform to the increasing commercialization of cultural activities.

Colquhoun notes that the winning scheme was the only entry to present the building as a "self-sufficient block." In so doing, he argues, it seems to have appealed to the jury for "the uncompromising way in which it interpreted the center as a supermarket of culture housed in a single entity, the prototype of which was the self-service store, the emblem of the liberal consumer society."<sup>117</sup> In trying to locate a historical origin for this "appeal" he refers to Baron Haussmann's vision of "an umbrella like structure" to represent the market as a new type among the many existing types of public buildings. He goes on to suggest that an even more potent image for the jury's concept

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<sup>115</sup> Massimo Dini, *Architectural documents: Renzo Piano* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1984): 126-127.

<sup>116</sup> Op.Cit, Rawstorne, p. 407

<sup>117</sup> Colquhoun, "Plateau Beaubourg," *Essays in Architectural Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985): 112.

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to suggest that an even more potent image for the jury's concept of the cultural center was the nineteenth-century international exhibition; "where the products of the world were displayed and where "culture" was equated with information."<sup>118</sup>

To complete the image of the consumer society, along with the notion of the 'supermarket' come the notions of 'leisure,' 'entertainment,' and the incorporation of advertising techniques. In describing the rationale behind their building the architects explain: "We want to make a loose infrastructure in which people can move, criss-cross on the way somewhere, live, eat, and enjoy themselves."<sup>119</sup> In Beaubourg we witness the deliberate programmed introduction of such activities, not as supportive services to the museum's basic function, but rather as basic functions in themselves.

The drawings presented to the jury spare no effort to present a leisure and entertainment oriented scheme (fig. 9 & 10). A festive and celebrational atmosphere is promoted by the use of tent structures in the piazza space "in which people can do anything from a black magic circle to a number of non-programmed activities."<sup>120</sup>

The notion of "*telematique*"<sup>121</sup> is clearly expressed by a number of huge billboard-like posters in the drawings, which judging by their size, are meant to be read from outside the building; 'eye-catchers' so to speak. This attitude is further enforced by the statements appearing on the building in both drawings: the first reads "Cycling champion", and the second reads "animated movie production for the... computer technique." It is not clear

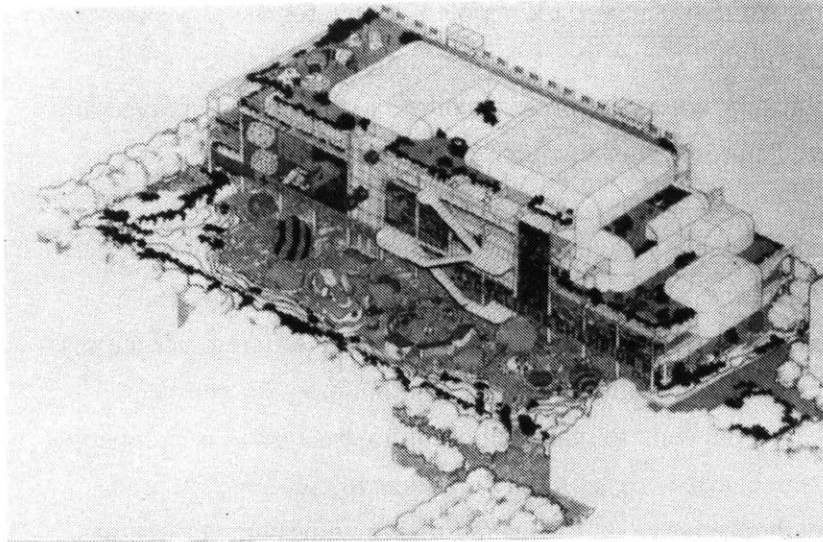
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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.112

<sup>119</sup> Rawstorne, "Piano+ Rogers," p. 407

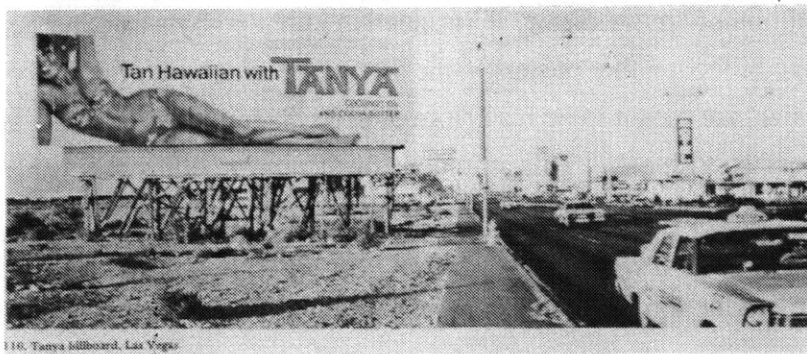
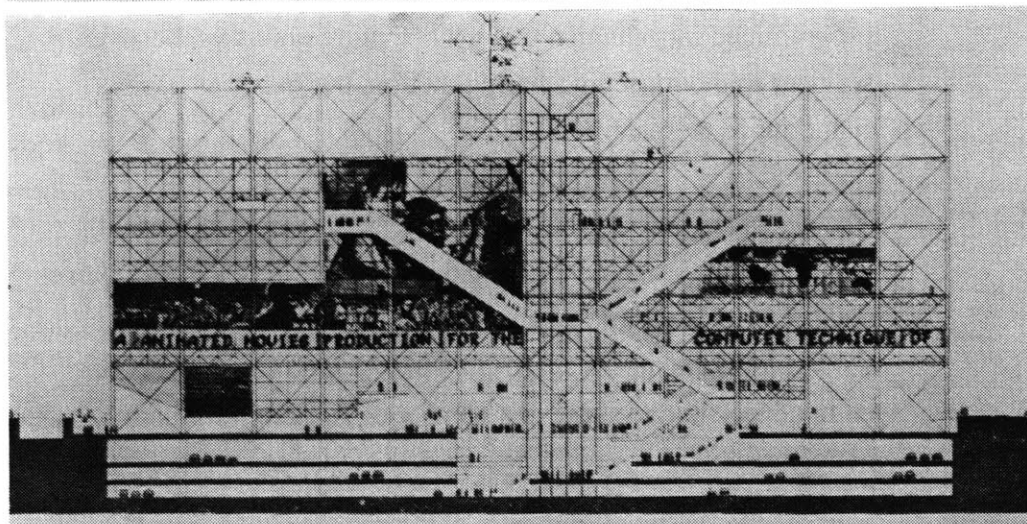
<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> A French neologism from television and informatique.



9. a. Beaubourg, competition drawing. From Antoine Pico, *Du Plateau Beaubourg au Centre Georges Pompidou*, 1987.

9.b. Beaubourg, main elevation, *Techniques et Architecture*, no.3, February 1972.



110. Tanya billboard, Las Vegas.

10. *Tanya billboard in Las Vegas.* It is interesting to observe the similarity in interest between Piano and Rogers on the one hand, and Venturi on the other. The main elevation of Beaubourg is animated by a huge billboard in the tradition of roadside advertising. From Robert Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972.

in the second case whether both phrases belong to the same sentence. Yet, it is very clear that "cycling championships," "animated movie production," and "computer techniques" are suggestive of a strong break from the conventional type of activities that take place in a museum, or a cultural center for that matter.

In their statement to the jury, the architects proposed that "the plateau Beaubourg be developed as a live center of information covering Paris and beyond, a cross between an information-oriented computerized Times Square and the British Museum."<sup>122</sup>

In describing the exciting character of the building Rogers explains:

"The external structure onto the piazza will provide constantly changing information, news, what's on in Paris, television, films, activities within the building, etc..."<sup>123</sup>

The press reacts enthusiastically:

"There is a project really coherent to the revolution of audio-visual media today in action."<sup>124</sup>

The appeal for mass culture is strong. What the architects propose and what the press/public cheerfully accept is a project which not only conforms to the aspirations of mass culture, but provides it with a new conquest, the conquest over meaning, over types, and over 'culture' itself. So much for the search of the cultural "agenda."

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<sup>122</sup> "Paris Contemporary Arts Centre," *The Architect's Journal*, no.30, vol. 154 (July 1971): 183.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Gio Ponti, "Piano + Rogers = Beaubourg," *Domus*, no.503 (October 1971):1-7.

The 'spectacularity' of Beaubourg is a function of its relation to the context, its formal expression, and the installation strategy deployed.

By presenting itself as a self-contained block of gigantic scale, Beaubourg rejects any attempt at integrating with the surrounding urban fabric, rendering it as merely a "buffer zone". It stands as a massive box that demands to be read in the round, an isolated object whose presence is strongly felt. Many of the proposals submitted to the jury interpreted the brief as something which could be classified and articulated into different elements and used this possibility to integrate the building into the surroundings by maintaining the roof line, picking up existing axes, breaking up the mass of the building, and so on. The winning scheme was alone in ignoring all these problems, and responding to the site with a "super block" (fig. 11). The sense of detachment is further amplified by the strong contrast between the 'high-tech' formal expression of the building and the traditional forms of the surroundings (fig. 12 ).



11. *Beaubourg. From Antoine Pico, Du Plateau Beaubourg au Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987.*





12. *Beaubourg*. From Antoine Pico, *Du Plateau Beaubourg au Centre Georges Pompidou*, 1987.

The 'high-tech' machine aesthetic expression is perhaps even more instrumental in generating the "spectacular ambiance" than the sense of detachment. It transforms the building into a huge machine," a gigantic flippers"<sup>125</sup> engaging the viewer in an endless agglomeration of architectural elements. In the multiplicity of the facade layers and the brilliant color coding we find a formal translation of Baudrillard's notion of "profusion" and "accumulation" ( fig. 13 ). An accumulation which mounts up for more than the sum of its products." The aesthetic experience which Beaubourg offers is one in which it is more important to keep the viewer stunningly engaged than to allow him the chance to comprehend and assess critically. It is one in which "the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide," to use Benjamin's analysis of the film.<sup>126</sup> By virtue of its animated expression the building asserts itself as the center of attraction, thus substituting the experience of "reception in a state of distraction," with reception in a state of attraction.

That this was the intention of the architects is an argument supported by the fact that a number of the structural elements constituting the facades had no structural role at all . In a biography of Rogers, Bryan Appleyard explains: "there was no need for the outer skeleton altogether, as the primary trusses could rest securely on the inner row of columns."<sup>127</sup> Moreover, "in shaping the gerberettes, the most sculptural solution was chosen from among a number of computer generated solutions."<sup>128</sup> Yet, the strongest piece of evidence of the primacy of the aesthetic concern in the making of Beaubourg is presented

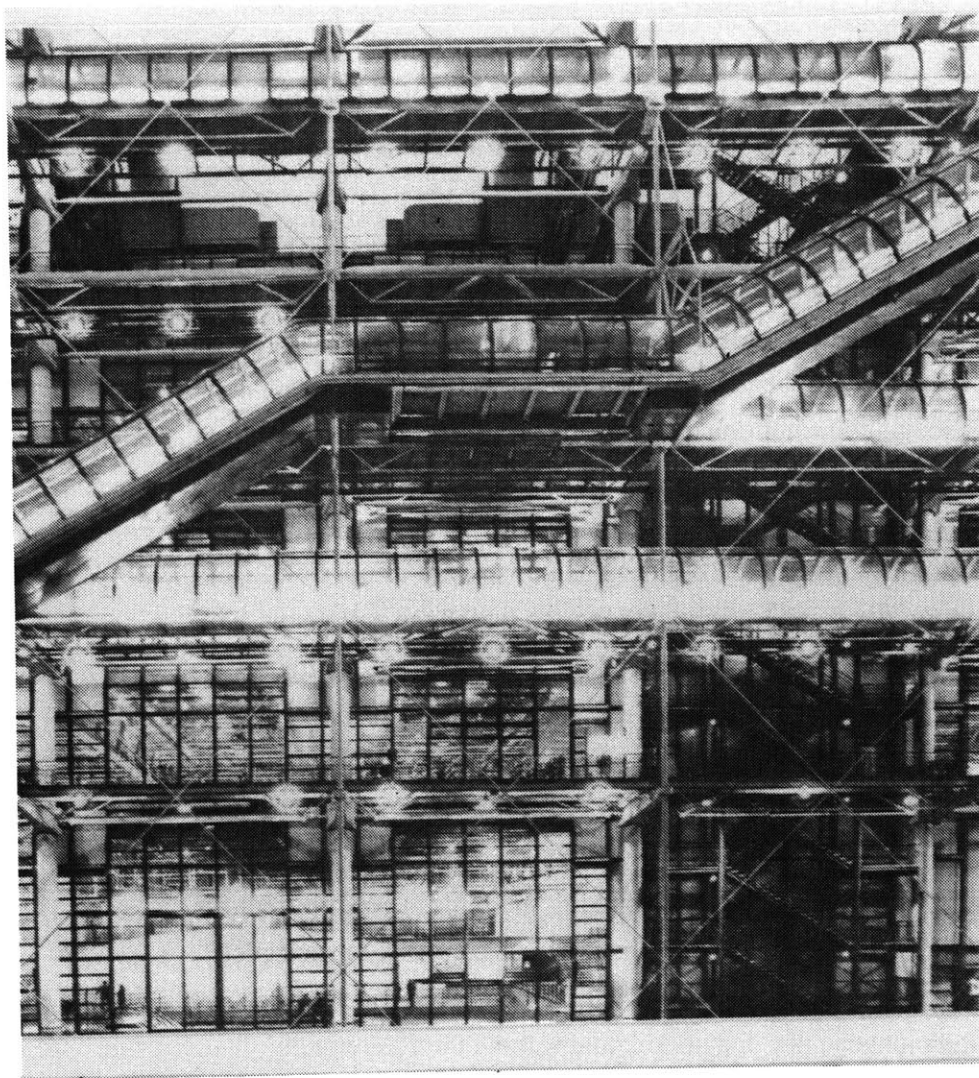
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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Video Culture*, John Hanhardt ed., ( New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986): 40-41.

<sup>127</sup> Bryan Appleyard, *Richard Rogers: A Biography*, ( Boston: Faber and Faber Press, 1980): 211.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



13. *Beaubourg*. From Antoine Pico, *Du Plateau Beaubourg au Centre Georges Pompidou*, 1987.

by Rice--the civil engineer for the project-- who explains that "he accepted the impractical requirement of the 150-ft span, sensible or not," because he realized that it was essential to the building; "without it most of the structural excitement and drama would have been lost."<sup>129</sup>

At this point, I would like to return to the proposition to view the building as "receding to serve as background for the human activities." As presented by the architects, this issue is loaded with social connotations emphasizing the building's total accessibility to everyone. The building is a monument for mass culture, if ever there was one. The architects expressed this ambition by making the building as transparent as possible. Although the degree of transparency to which the architects aspired was dramatically reduced in the actual building for technical reasons, the concept remains an issue. The experience of seeing through the building, shares a strong similarity to that of looking into a window-shop. The attitude of granting to the public the accessibility of a museum is, I would like to argue, different from the position of making the building transparent. In this context, transparency works in the direction of the complete effacement of the institution. The museum space and the street are complementary, not in a conceptual sense-- art that reflects everyday life-- but in a physical sense; art that can be seen from the street. There is a crucial difference to be maintained between seeing art on the street, and seeing into the art space from the street. The latter embodies the act of violating the space itself, of draining the institution of the element of particularity that makes for the notion of significance. In some way it is the physical translation of the loss of 'aura', and the substitution of "cult-value" by "exhibition-value." The sense of exhibition in this

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

case goes beyond what Benjamin described, or could have anticipated.

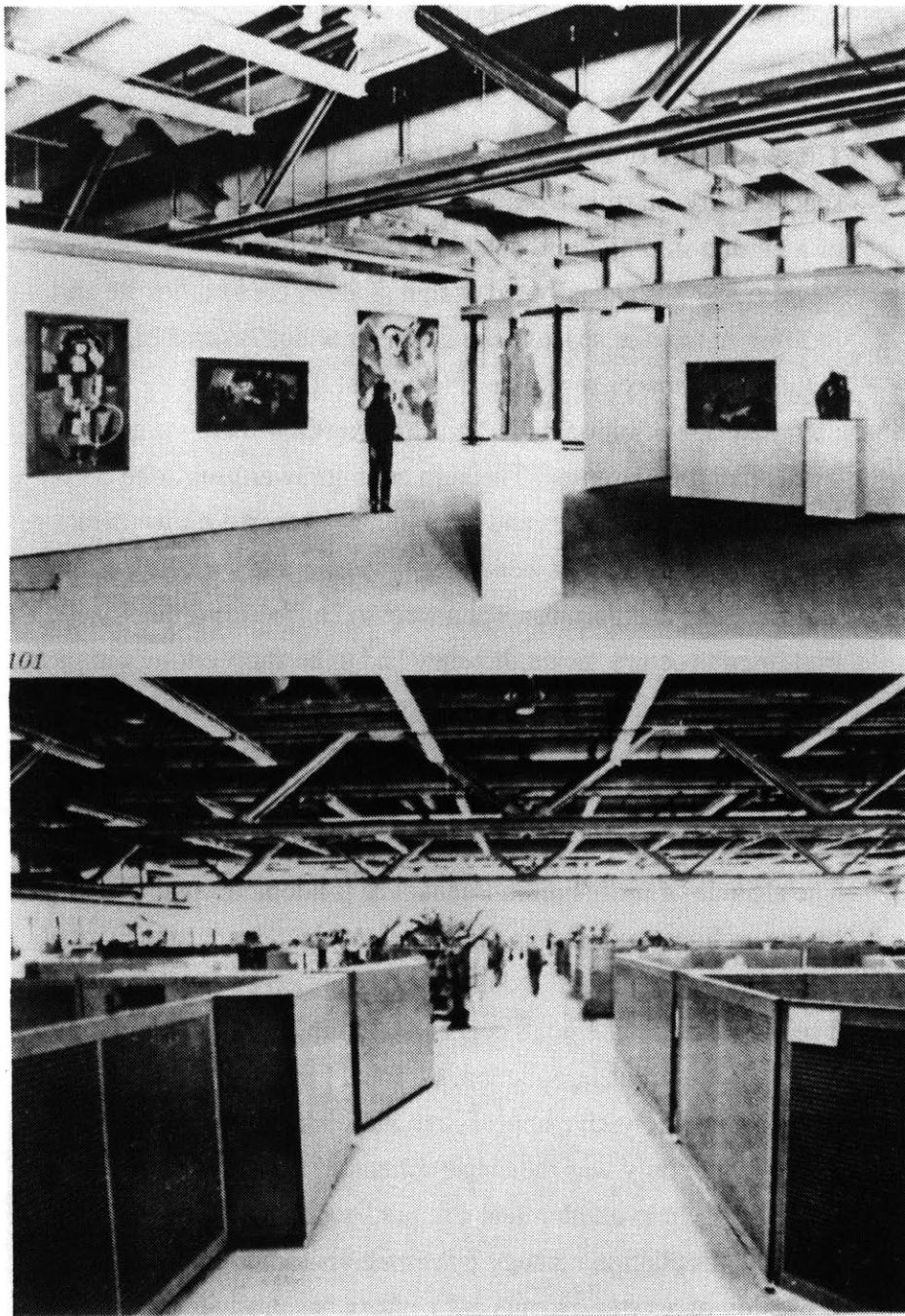
The experience of the interior is haunted by the sense of spectacularity starting from "the forum, that vast no-man's-land of a pit that stupefies and confuses every visitor to Beaubourg."<sup>130</sup> The adopted design strategy created hostile and indifferent interior spaces. The 50 meter wide, 7 meter high column free spaces resemble "the neutral spaces of vast commercial exhibition halls," crushing by their mere volume any works that are exhibited. The high ceilings swarming with 3 meter deep lattice beams and colored pipes became a menacing intrusion on the relation between the viewer and the work of art. The decision that partition walls were to be free from the buildings structure meant that they had to be short enough to pass under the large lattice beams. The spaces created by the partition wall suffered from a sense of compression under the weight of a 3 meter deep ceiling zone (fig.14 ).

The attitude of profusion in Beaubourg is adopted as an ideology by the architects conscious decision to neglect the particularity of the various departments exhaustively specified in the program. The open-space scheme as conceived in the building neglected the notion of spatial differentiation, essential for installation strategies that assume a sensitive approach to the works of art exhibited. As a result, "not only was the entire collection from Fauvism to the present shown in an identical manner," says Yve-Alain Bois, but also "the installation strategy leaves the visitor recognizing the profusion of art movements our century has produced."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, "Museum Update," *Art in America* (April 1986): 43-47.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



14. *Centre Pompidou. Shots of interior spaces. From Alan Colquhoun, "Plateau Beaubourg." Essays in Architectural Criticism, 1981.*

As a teacher of art history Bois explains:

"I am one of the many who have always hated Beaubourg - certainly not the building's exterior, but the extreme confusion of its interior spaces. I made frequent pilgrimages to the museum's old quarters in Palais de Tokyo; but at Beaubourg, these works of art had become more or less inaccessible to me. In the supposedly flexible Pompidou Centre it was impossible to concentrate on the art, let alone find pleasure or enlightenment."<sup>132</sup>

It is interesting to see how he fails to understand the connection between the "building's exterior" which she does not seem to mind, and the disastrous "interior space" which he so strongly criticizes. In fact it is more than just interesting, it is the evidence of the reduction of architecture to mere aesthetics in the age of mass media aesthetics. What makes the situation more distressing, and the danger more real is the fact that our architects, Piano and Rogers, in conforming to an avant-garde position that aims at "the creation of a new world culture," insist that their building be understood as a "servicing mechanism" that "recedes to the background when "animated by people." In so doing they refrain from endowing their building with any assertive role, thus handing it over to the logic of "animated" media and the values of consumption, "supermarket". Once again their position conforms to Venturi's definition of the role of the architect "as a combiner of old clichés ('decadent banalities') in new contexts." This, Venturi argues, becomes his new condition "within a society which directs its best efforts, its big money, its elegant technologies elsewhere."<sup>133</sup>

What Beaubourg offers is a set of contradictions. Its multi-layered 'high-tech' structural expression contradicts the logic of technology that calls for efficiency and truth of expression. Its

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> R. Venturi, "A Justification for a Pop Architecture," *Art and Architecture* (April 1965): .22.

spaces contradict the function of exhibition they are supposed to house. Its aggressive relation to its surrounding is contradictory to its role as a cultural institution embedded in social systems. Yet, ironically it gains popularity by the day as can be established from the ever increasing number of visitors. Baudrillard forwards the argument that; "through its very contradictions [Beaubourg] is the most exact reflection possible of the present state of affairs."

In view of what we have learned from this analysis, one cannot but agree with Baudrillard's argument. Beaubourg is the manifestation of the "complicit contradiction" and the "false dialectic" that provides the illusion of a false revolution.<sup>134</sup> It is the quintessential prototype for the consumer society, providing for the consumption of culture.

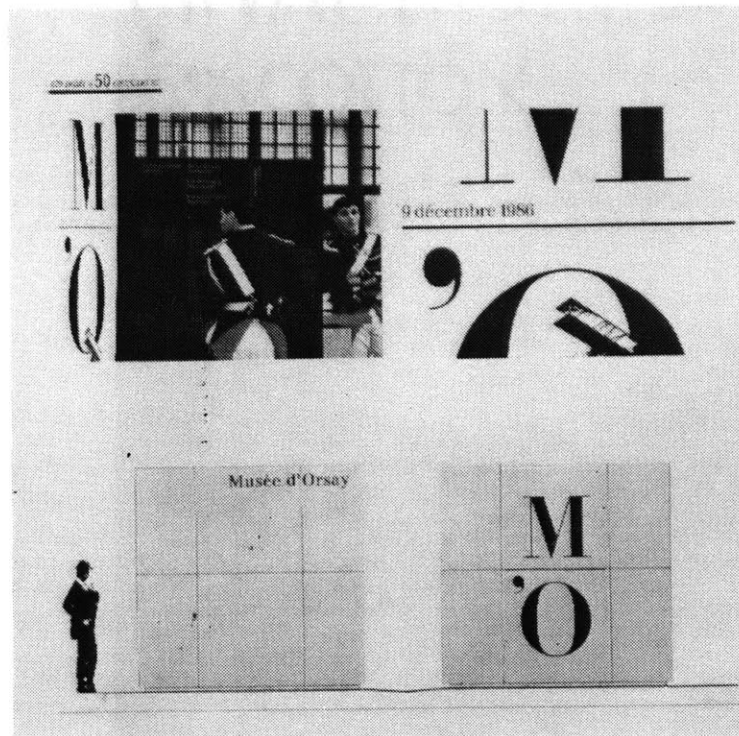
Amidst all this, what remains of the role of architecture and the architect ? We will postpone an answer until we have discussed the second case; Musée d'Orsay.

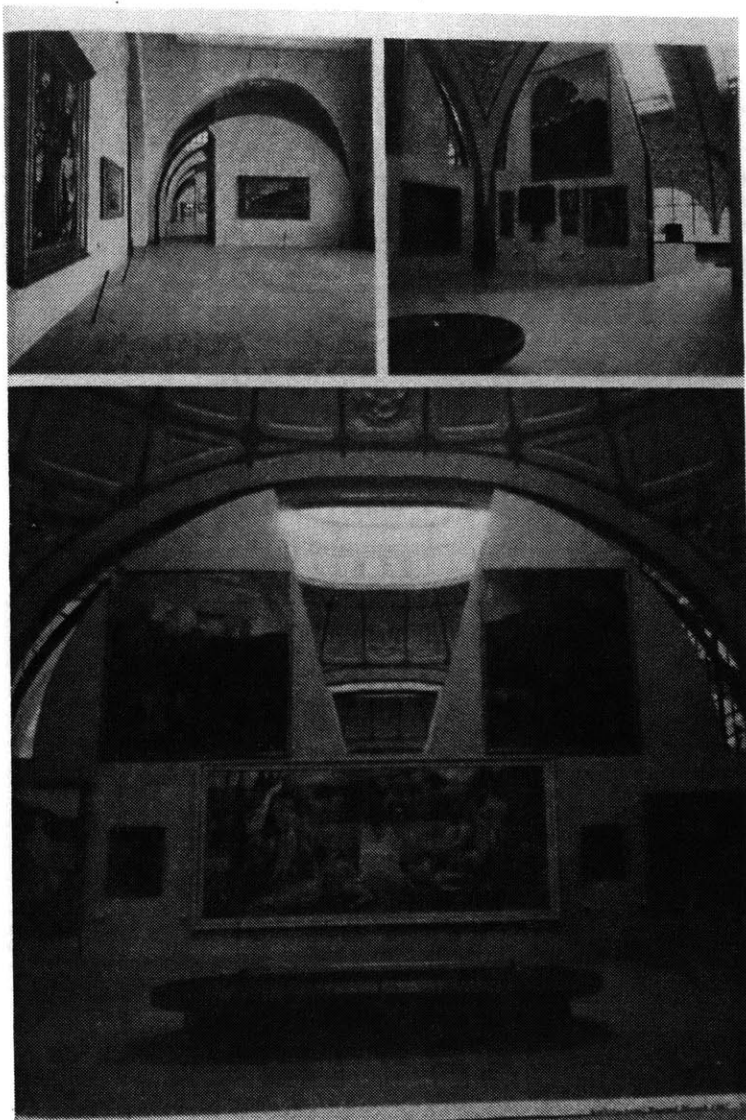
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<sup>134</sup> This being the contradiction between production and consumption, between the controlling and the controlled as discussed in an earlier chapter.



## Musée d'Orsay





15. Orsay, paintings being manipulated around to fit into the available surface. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, December, 1986.

"Never has there been a museum whose publicity shots reveal such a variety of perfectly composed theatrical images."<sup>135</sup> The spectacle is inaugurated by the "amazing" dialogue carried out in the main central space. The dialectic is amplified to the highest volume by the 'loud' contradiction between the architecture of the old structure and that of the new, generating the schizophrenic experience, in the Jamesonian sense.<sup>136</sup> The play in scale makes it difficult for the eye to rest. For the *Architectural Record*, Charles Gandee writes:

"The eye veers from metal bridges with beefy structural supports to stone staircases with flimsy aluminum panels bolted to their sides; from guard rails of wire mesh laid over metal grids to bizarre stone-panel constructions tentatively titled in front of air conditioners."<sup>137</sup>

From the huge structural envelope to the free standing walls to the exhibited works, three painful jumps exhaust the perceptive energy and eliminate, with one blow, the slightest chance for a contemplative experience. The works of art are reduced, by virtue of their size, to mere accent colors in this architectural landscape: "the paintings themselves, pegged to stone walls, are butterflies dried and mounted"<sup>138</sup> ( fig.15 ). The great hall becomes a virtual landscape providing a perfect spot for a picnic on the grounds of the scenic Orsay. No wonder Barbara Rose, in her review of the

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<sup>135</sup> Patricia Mainardi, "Postmodern History at the Musée d'Orsay," *October*, no.41 ( Summer 1987 ), 36.

<sup>136</sup> In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Fredric Jameson describes two significant features of the postmodern expression ; pastiche and schizophrenia. The schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence.

F. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti Aesthetic*, Hal Foster, ed. ( Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983 ), 119.

<sup>137</sup> Charles K. Gandee, "Missed Connections," *Architectural Record*, (March 1987), 128.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Mathews, "The Controversial Musée d'Orsay," *Progressive Architecture*, no.2, ( 1987 ), 36.

Orsay announced that: "museum visits today are replacing country outings as a way to relax and revive."<sup>139</sup>

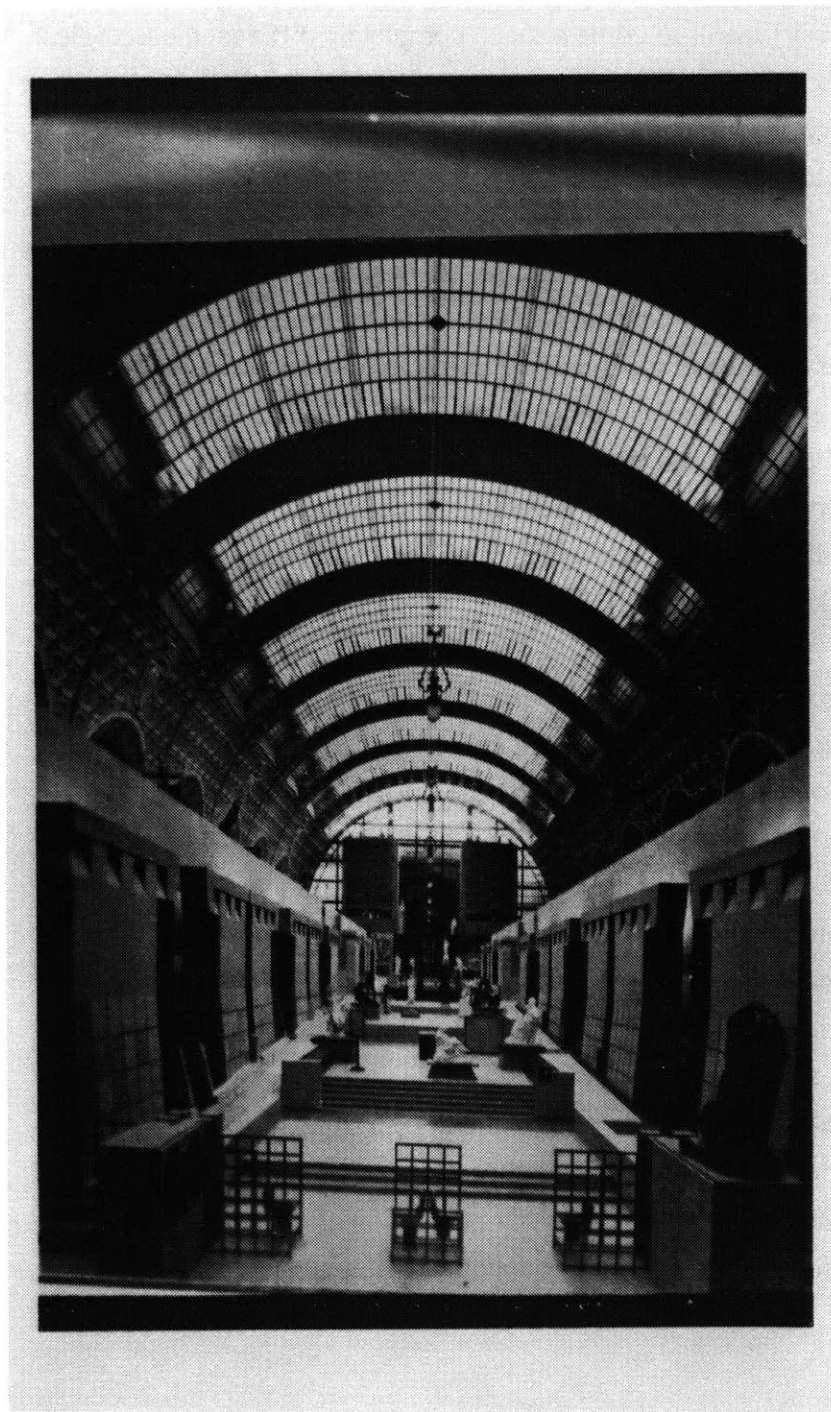
In her analysis of the building, Patricia Mainardi was quick to declare that: "Aulenti's experience as a stage set designer is immediately apparent."<sup>140</sup> The central nave in its openness, flatness, and detachment from the old structure, asserts itself as a floating stage, upon which the visitors take part in playing the roles for the benefit of entertaining the visiting masses. Indeed the museum has repeatedly been described as a "gigantic stage set." Yet the central nave is not the only component of the spectacle. In its design, the museum is conceived as a series of startlingly dramatic vignettes, exhibiting a rich variety in the architectural treatment of the side galleries. In applauding its scenic photogenic nature Michel Lacollete, a principle administrator of the museum, describes it as: "a photographer's paradise," providing a multiplicity of points of view.

And to further entertain the sensibilities of the visitors, multi-media installations are present. In criticizing the historical inaccuracy of the multi-media installation of the Paris Opera by the theatrical designer Richard Peduzzi, Mainardi acknowledges its extreme popularity among the museum visitors. This popularity is expressive of the visitors desire to see what they came for, entertainment and not contemplation. Indeed, it is arguably the "high culture Disneyland" character of this particular installation that allowed it to survive the otherwise tragic and comprehensive subsumption of all the other nineteenth century art, which due to its "non-multi media" quality failed to rhyme with the architectural spectacle. In describing the effect of the architecture on the reception of the exhibits Gandee writes: "it

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<sup>139</sup>Rose, p. 396.

<sup>140</sup> Op.Cit, Mainardi, p. 36.



16. Orsay, central nave, *Technique et Architecture*, October/November, 1986.

[Orsay] seems to come out of a completely different museological logic, one that does not put art on a 'pedestal'-- no matter how marvellous it might be-- but strives to put it into some sort of context that is stimulating and entertaining."<sup>141</sup>

As a "photographer's paradise," to use the words of M. Lacollete, the museum allowed for an unlimited spectrum of shots. Of those shots used as publicity for the museum, two have appeared on the pages of most all the magazines, both journalistic and architectural, and more significantly were among the few official publicity shots presented in the official catalogue. A reading of the shots may reveal much of what they say about the building.

The first is the shot taken from the area of the ticket counters looking down into the main nave ( fig.16 )<sup>142</sup>. It is the first encounter the visitor has with the interior of the exhibition hall, one which grants him a position of total command over the main hall, echoing, I would like to argue, the experience of sitting in the royal box of a theater. The impact, we are told by reporters, is "breath taking". It delivers an over-dose of aesthetic experience, so rich, so complex, so removed by virtue of the vantage point, that the spectacular-- as in theatrical-- imprint is stamped right then and there. In describing the impact of this vantage point Carlo Bertelli of *Domus* writes: "To have seen the 140m. length of the hall rising modifies our perception of the space. The statues, separated not chronologically but by size, are

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<sup>141</sup> Op.Cit, Gandee, p. 128.

<sup>142</sup> Of the periodicals and magazines researched, this shot appeared in: *Architectural Record* (March 1987), *Progressive Architecture*, no. 2 (1987 ), *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Dec.1986), *Technique et Architecture* (Oct./ Nov. 1986), *Time Magazine* (Dec. 1986) *Vogue* (Feb. 1987).

telescopically brought together. Where we should have seen a space, we find instead the density of a museum."<sup>143</sup>

It is interesting to note that the original design scheme as presented by A.C.T. Architecture included an indirect entrance plan. In describing the experience of entering the space, Pierre Vaisse of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, writes:

"As you pass through the marquee into the light-filled hall and approach by the ticket counter, the huge nave is already visible. Is it better to reveal the view immediately or to create a surprise, as was originally planned; in either case the spectator will enjoy the breathtaking sight."<sup>144</sup>

A sight which, he adds, causes one to wonder: "What is **everything** doing here?"

If the story told by the first picture is somewhat expected, the second operates on a more subliminal level. I am referring of course to the endlessly reproduced shot of the twin figures by Falquiere and Moulin framing the station's giant clock (fig.17)<sup>145</sup>. The picture is composed such that the dancing figures are shown free from their supporting stands dancing in the air, 'having a good time'. The notion "good time" is enforced by the position of the clock between the two merry figures. It is rather odd that this particular shot is marked by the complete absence of the new 'design' to be celebrated. More interesting is the fact that the vantage point from which the visitor encounters this particular composition does not correspond to any significant

<sup>143</sup> Carlo Bertelli, "Gare du Quai d'Orsay," *Domus*, no.679 (January 1987), 29-50.

<sup>144</sup> Pierre Vaisse, "Musée d'Orsay Paris; Act Architecture," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no.248 (Dec. 1986), 1-25. [this survey is not inclusive of all the publications and magazines that discussed the museum].

<sup>145</sup> This particular shot appeared in the following magazines: *Architectural Record* (March 1987), *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Dec. 1986), *New York Times* (Dec. 4 1986), *Time Magazine* (Dec.8 1986), and in J.Jenger, *Orsay, De la Gare au Musée*, 1986.



17. Orsay. *Architectural Record*, March, 1987.



architectural happening in the composition of the museum, but is rather one which the visitor comes across casually while strolling in the nave. This observation suggests that the shot was deliberately composed, thus reinforcing the hypothesis that the message conceived is intentional.

"Is Orsay serene? No, its spaces and forms are too complicated and too many unjustified effects are attempted."<sup>146</sup>

"In the end, the critical distance essential to judgement is overwhelmed by architecture."<sup>147</sup> "Orsay aims for impact."<sup>148</sup>

Orsay is a spectacle. Not so much because its architecture is rich, controversial, or complex, going beyond the dialectic into a "trio," as Matthews puts it; but because those very qualities are directed against the function of the museum. In the Musée d'Orsay, the works of art, overpowered by the architectural environment, are forced to retreat to a corner ( Fig.18 ).

Most of the criticism directed to the principles governing Orsay's installation addressed what some art historians considered to be the problematic historical presentation. The exhibits were seen to express an attitude of aesthetic eclecticism, a fact which, in accord with Victor Cousin's eclecticism of 1855, reduced art to a purely aesthetic reading devoid of any historical or political connotations.<sup>149</sup> While the debate over the merit of the attitude of historical eclecticism in the Orsay is not of primary interest to us,

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<sup>146</sup> *L'Architecture d' Aujourd'hui*, no. 248, (Dec. 1986), 1-25 [ This survey is by no means inclusive of all the publications and magazines that discussed the museum].

<sup>147</sup> Op.Cit, T. Matthews,

<sup>148</sup> Op.Cit, *Progressive Architecture*

<sup>149</sup> P. Mainardi in "The Political Origins of Modernism," argues that Victor Cousin's program of aesthetic eclecticism of 1855 had the intention of, and succeeded in, emptying art of its politically inflammatory content, replacing it with neutral, purely aesthetic readings. P. Mainardi, *Art Journal* (Spring 1985), 11-17.



18. Orsay. Interior shot, *Technique et Architecture*, October/November, 1986.

it nevertheless sheds light on particular installation decisions that bare evidence of the attitude of display and profusion.

The feeling of profusion is conveyed through the huge numbers of works exhibited. Their sheer number caused Patricia Mainardi, in "Postmodern History at the Musée d'Orsay,"<sup>150</sup> to wonder: "if Orsay's program consisted of nothing more than emptying out the storage rooms of the Louvre."<sup>151</sup> In accord with Baudrillard's definition of profusion, the installation techniques promoted, through the use of a large variety of installation and communication techniques, a sense of heterogeneity and amazement. Thus the possibility of contemplative reception is eliminated and an amazed, idle reception is promoted instead. What Baudrillard calls "flirting with the objects in a state of idle wandering."<sup>152</sup> This fact was indirectly acknowledged by Mainardi in her criticism of most of the exhibits as having been transformed by the installation strategy to: "mindless forms of mass media."<sup>153</sup> It is worth noting that the variety of installation techniques and the diversity of spaces were decisions made on the highest level and freely acknowledged in the program.<sup>154</sup>

The thematic heterogeneity of the exhibits gives rise to the notion of display. Failing to provide any global sequential or thematic logic, the exhibits collapse into autonomous groups and collections; the only relation among them is that of physical "cohabitation."<sup>155</sup> The reaction to this obvious fragmentation

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<sup>150</sup> Patricia Mainardi, "Postmodern History at The Musée d'Orsay", *October*, no.41 (Summer 1987), 30-52.

<sup>151</sup> Op.cit, Mainardi, p. 38.

<sup>152</sup> Op.cit, Baudrillard, p. 31.

<sup>153</sup> Op.cit, Mainardi, p. 36.

<sup>154</sup> The program is laid out in the press information, chapter 3, "La museographie."

<sup>155</sup> In *Le Debat*, Michel Lacollete declares that: he does not believe that there exists any fundamental unity among the different tendencies.

and cohabiting fluctuated between a position that sees in it a major revision of nineteenth-century art history, and one that considers it a problematic historical representation. Standing outside the debate of art historians, one can see in it the proliferation of the logic of display, "calculus of objects," in which the object has no specific value, and contains no inherent meaning as such. Rather its meaning and value are a function of the context of the objects in the calculus display. We are presented with the works of the Impressionists, the Avant-garde, and the *Pompier*s. The collectivity is what speaks, not because of an inherent muteness of the individual work of art as such, but rather because of the reductionist nature of the notion of grouping which brings out the least common denominator as a measure of identification. This speaks of the reduction in the nature of the intellectual experience from 'knowledge' to 'information', indiscriminate and uncritical information being the dominant form of knowledge in the age of media. In praising the Orsay's 'informative' nature, John Russell of the *New York Times* wrote one week prior to the official inauguration of the museum:

"If you are looking for an illustrated history of the bentwood chair, you will find it. If the incunabula of the movies are more to your taste, you will find them too. If you are interested in turn-of-the-century art as it expressed itself in Vienna, in Glasgow and Chicago, the Orsay has the matter wrapped up and packaged." <sup>156</sup>

What can the Orsay example tell us about the revolutionary merit of the "complex and contradictory" architecture? The sense of architectural complexity, in the Orsay results from Aulenti's decision to build a structure within a structure. Aulenti justified this decision by referring to such pragmatic factors as the total

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<sup>156</sup> John Russell, "Encyclopedia Museum: Reviewing the Orsay," *The New York Times*, (Dec.4, 1986), 1.

exhibition area required and the difficulty of integrating it with the older structure. Yet the main source of contradiction stems from the use of an architectural vocabulary that evokes Egyptian references. Between the two coexisting historical references, that of the turn of the century industrialization on the one hand, and that of a totally removed Egyptian vocabulary on the other, a noisy dialectic is created. In the absence of a common logic, the dialogue is reduced to pure noise, which adds up to no intelligible content.

A number of interpretations have been evoked by the challenge of this seemingly "un-intelligible" code. Theodore Reff proposes that the Egyptian motives evoke a sense of the exotic past, in which the 19th century collapses, and comes to feel too distant. The arcaded space with the miniature internal facades resembles the oriental bazaar: "Thus our experience of the Orsay, with its seemingly countless treasures gathered from several Parisian and provincial museums, can be seen as a great voyage of discovery into what is still a somewhat exotic terrain or as an intellectual shopping spree in what is perhaps the richest bazaar of French culture."<sup>157</sup>

Robert Rosenblum, having been deeply moved by the "stupendous achievement," explains that the architectural environment of the Orsay reminded him "of John Martin's sublime historical time machine." He goes to describe how Aulenti manages to "waft spectators" from the "the depths of the pageantry and grandiose of the 19th century, to the imaginary heights of, say, Babylon and Nineveh the moment before their civilization crumbled."<sup>158</sup> It is interesting how Rosenblum's

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<sup>157</sup> Theodore Reff, "The Musée d'Orsay: A Symposium," in *Art in America*, (January 1988), 96.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Rosenblum, "The Musée d'Orsay: A Symposium," *Art in America*, (January 1988), 92.

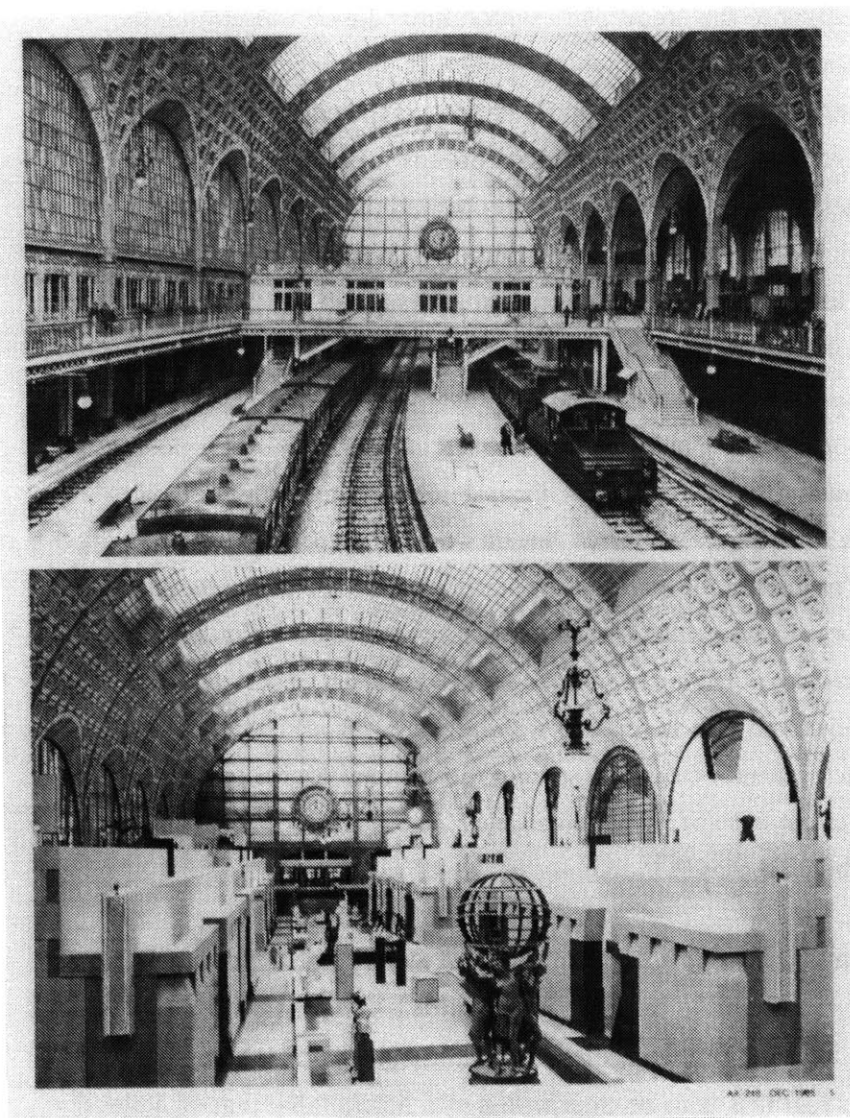
description is void of any reference to the context of the viewer; the last quarter of the 20th century as if it has no bearing on his experience. Perhaps it is exactly this sense of historical fantasy that Aulenti aims for in her architecture.

I am tempted to present an interpretation that approaches the issue from a "social history" perspective. The administration of Orsay had since its early day of planning announced a certain attention to the idea, "the mission," of a social history of art. As an "eco-muss," its main aim was to "participate in reconstructing a collective memory," which would involve the visitors "in understanding their culture and hence their identity."<sup>159</sup> The complexity and contradiction in Orsay reveal the tension between the industrial nature of the 19th century, the new needs and means that generated the train station, and the nature of the late 20th century with the primacy of leisure and entertainment provided for by this museum. In the act of appropriating a building geared for production and circulation for the benefit of leisure and "visual pleasure" as practiced in Orsay, stands the clearest manifestation of the change in the cultural situation. Never has the relation between the two building types; the train station, and the museum been so antithetical (fig.19).

Understood in this manner, "complexity and contradiction" has a critical edge to it. Nevertheless, this edge is not perceived nor promoted by the architect. In Orsay, "complexity and contradiction" as preached by Venturi, is used to generate a loud, and stunning, dialogue between styles and forms thus functioning as "a breathtaking spectacle of layered associations," the sole purpose of which is to stun the visitor and cover up for the more serious issue in question. In this respect it functions

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<sup>159</sup> Michele Cone, "The Eco-Musee -- New Life for Some French Landmarks," *New York Times*, (Aug. 21 1977), 21.



19. Orsay before and after, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 248, December, 1986.

similarly to the credit card, which lures the consumer into the magical land of complete accessibility and sweet consumption, covering up the checks and balances of the economic dialectic of consumption and production. Perhaps it is the building's success in achieving this aim that stands behind the request that it "quickly become a textbook classic of postmodernism."<sup>160</sup> Even the less enthusiastic reviews of the Orsay did not fail to associate it with postmodernism. Marvin Trachtenberg writes:

"The Orsay would appear to combine the stylized mechano-morphic iconography exemplified by the Citrohan with the historicist emphasis that saturates postmodernism, seen, for example, in Johnson's "Chippendale" AT&T building or in Moore's "Piazza d'Italia." The postmodernist conceit of the "palimpsest," involving the restoration of visible traces of the physical history of a place, also is suggestively connected to the Orsay, as is Robert Stern's idea of reusing Labrouste's famous columnar cross section as facade. . . Beyond all such associations with specific postmodernist ideas, the Orsay reflects generally the intense spirit of wit and irony that has pervaded the movement, a theme set by Venturi and Moore, and embodied in the persona of Philip Johnson."<sup>161</sup>

Distressing as this may sound for Aulenti, a designer who is unsympathetic to postmodernist attitudes and historicist architecture, it nevertheless is what meets the observant eye in Orsay. If this is to be interpreted as a hero's fall-- that of Aulenti - then the situation is unfortunate but not alarming. More soberly, the situation suggests the fall of the heros -- state, museum, culture, architecture-- rather than a hero's fall.

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<sup>160</sup> Op.cit., Rosenblum

<sup>161</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg, "The Musée d'Orsay: A Symposium," *Art in America*, (January 1988), 106.



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## **Between Genesis and Decadence**



In the course of this critical inquiry, we have accepted the polemic that post-industrial western societies have been undergoing a new phase of cultural change. This phase is characterized by a complex evolutionary movement whose symptoms are often contradictory and seem to defy orthodox systematization. We also accepted late capitalist ideology as a major force behind the instigation of this change. Despite the controversy and semantic confusion that surround it, the term *postmodern* was adopted to define this new phase. On the basis of these premises, we addressed the already posed question, What is postmodern architecture?

To answer the question we chose to examine the relation of this architecture to the postmodern condition. In structuring our approach, we rejected monolithic historical practice, in favour of "multilineal" history. Building on these grounds, we selectively opted to examine the relationship from the perspective of consumption, and within the context of the museum. We presented a theoretical model of consumption, hypothesized a number of ramifications that may bear on the field of architecture, and tested for the manifestation of such ramifications in two case studies. Now, an answer to the question as to what this line of inquiry has revealed about the nature of postmodern architecture and its alleged relation to cultural postmodernity is due. We may recall one last time that the findings of this critical inquiry are conditioned by, and confined to the realm of the hueristic arguments chosen.

#### *Monopoly capitalism and the autonomy of architecture*

In discussing Baudrillard's analysis of monopoly capitalism, we demonstrated the system's inability to abolish completely the dialectic of production and consumption. Furthermore, we

demonstrated that the system still operates along the lines of social stratification. Thus, in so doing we have falsified the notion of the total control of the system, and allowed for a space of resistance.

We have also come to demonstrate that the ideology of postmodern architecture assumes a state of complete conformity to that of monopoly capitalism. Accepting and enhancing the total commercialization of culture and of architecture as well.

At this point, I would like to use the notion of space of resistance, in a metaphorical sense, to criticize the ideological conformity of postmodern architecture. The question may arise as to whether we are suggesting that architecture should, or could, deposit itself in this space and function as a resisting ideology. In its own right, this is an issue worthy of investigation. Yet, in view of the continuing and fundamental relation between architecture and patronage, it seems unlikely that architecture can demonstrate resistance to economic ideology. At any rate this line of investigation takes us out of the domain of this study.

Instead, I would like to draw an analogy between the space of resistance, and the autonomy of the discipline of architecture. In the same manner that monopoly capitalism tries to suppress this space through the power of "artificial accelerators"-- form-sign, simulation, and media-- postmodern architectural practice tries to suppress and abolish any degree of autonomy that the discipline exhibits by such artificial accelerators as: fashionable stylization, and the primacy of visibility in architectural aesthetics.

To support this analogy, we only need to remind ourselves of Venturi's call to abolish forms-in-space for the benefit of symbols-in space, and his promotion of "antispacial"

architecture. One may wish to recall Piano and Rogers' position that Beaubourg should serve as a background for the animating activity of the users. Their position suggests that architecture should not be concerned with any typology of spaces or human uses but that these functions should be handed over to the spontaneous forces of life. In so arguing they assume that architecture has no task other than to perfect its own image. This in turn reduces the potential of architecture as a representation of social needs and values to a purely aesthetic one.

The two cases studied illustrate this problem with unshattered clarity. Beaubourg and Orsay are examples of architectural production that was primarily conceived of through aesthetic considerations. Both buildings fail to meet the function of exhibition, central to their definition as museums. Their failure to do so stems from a loose and rather problematic understanding of the typology of the museum, which justified its collapse into a commercial type; alongside the "supermarket", the "drugstore", and the "shopping mall."

Suffice it to say that if the consumer society calls for a spectacular, and entertaining architecture that works along the lines of commercial models yet provide for information and cultural activities, then perhaps it is time a new typology was conceived to meet these new demands. One cannot but wonder whether Tschumi's La Villette is symptomatic of a movement in this direction.

The central argument forwarded to justify the ideological complicity of postmodern architecture plays the economic alibi and stresses the inevitable commodification of architecture under the impact of the market strategies of monopoly capitalism. A closer investigation of the issue reveals that the architectural artifact resists collapse into commodity form.

Commodities are transitory artifacts which continuously have to be replaced for the benefit of the mechanism of consumption. Buildings have relatively unlimited durability. Even under the predicament of fashionable stylization, buildings, due to their durability, tend to outlive the fashion wave in which they were conceived and continue to act as part of the architectural landscape. Their "meaning-effect" fades away leaving behind a reality of form, space, and experience. Moreover, While commercial buildings and developer-built houses may be readily subjected to the rigors of the marketplace, other types, of which the museum is one, exist in a situation strongly isolated from the forces of the marketplace which may render them as commodities. As government sponsored institutions, Beaubourg and Orsay, exist in a context free of the pressure of the marketplace. The fact that their architecture assumes strong affinity to commercial environments cannot, in this case be justified by the commercial alibi.

But why do postmodern architects surrender all autonomy to capitalist ideology? To blame it on unethical conduct on the part of the architects involved, is to miss the point. For if we are to accept the argument that ours is a consumer culture, then is it not in accord with architectural discourse that an authentic representation of cultural conditions, in both their material and ideological dimensions, is indeed ethical conduct! The problem, I would like to argue, lies in the authenticity of the representation and the mode of expression, rather than the ideology, values, or condition represented.

In aspiring to communicate through the logic of billboards and advertising, the postmodernists forced architecture to behave in a manner not inherent to its nature, emphasizing formal considerations over all other. This, I venture to claim, is not only a function of the pressure of the patron, but primarily a result of

the primacy of the aesthetic discourse in the discipline of architecture. This primacy is the result of a grand historical project which concerned itself for centuries with formal architectural expression and stylistic categorization, and continuously attempted to group architecture with the fine arts.

A tight professional garment and an aesthetically based architectural heritage were understood to have hindered the architects of the first machine age from a meaningful appreciation of the full potential of industrial technology, and consequently blamed for the emergence of the "machine aesthetic." In the age of mass media technology, the problem re-manifests itself in the form of "media aesthetics." In *Learning from Las Vegas*, the proclaimed bible of postmodern architecture, Robert Venturi notes:

"Each medium has its day, and the rhetorical environmental statements of our time --civic commercial, or residential-- will come from media more purely symbolic, perhaps less static and more adaptable to the scale of our environment."<sup>162</sup>

In presenting itself as an aesthetically based discourse, postmodern architecture rendered itself particularly vulnerable to the impact of the visual technology. Under the omnipresence of media and the aggressive mechanism of advertising, the visual constituent of the aesthetic discourse in architecture was promoted to a level hitherto unparalleled.

Postmodern architecture can thus be understood as the manifestation of the latest phase of development in the aesthetic discourse in architecture, a phase that is characterized by the primacy of visual concerns in the making of architecture. As to

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<sup>162</sup> R. Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, ( Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 130.

whether this stage is terminal is not yet clear. Yet what becomes clear at the end of this exercise is that what started as a declaration of the death of the Modern movement, may eventually bring about the death of architecture itself.

*Postmodernity and postmodern architecture: the missing connection*

If we are to understand postmodernity as the attempt towards the definition of new ways of interpreting the world, then what are we to make of the alleged relation between postmodern architecture and this intellectual movement. Facts speak for themselves. Postmodern architecture has conformed to and operated upon the paradigms "rejected" by postmodernity.

By claiming the freedom to pluck and arrange motifs from all times and styles, postmodern architects conform to the very project of monolithic stylistic history from which postmodernity has departed. The ambiance that historical collages are supposed to convey, fail to operate without a historically prescribed meaning for each and every component. Otherwise they fall back to the realm of pure formal compositions. Without a historically prescribed perspective which defines and positions Pharaonic architecture in relation to that of industry, Orsay would have not been the same. Clearly, in using pharaonic motives Aulenti aspired for more than just their formal characteristics.

The attitude of pluralism is but an inversion of that of determinism. For while the latter set to establish unified and uniform criteria of creation and measures of evaluation, the second substitutes those for the determinism of the marketplace. In postmodern architecture, quality and credibility are willfully subjected to the measures of the marketplace, and the mechanism of fashion. Postmodern architecture is about what



people like. What people like is a product of culture industry. Culture industry is a mechanism of manipulation.

This brings us to the continuing dilemma of situating architecture in relation to a discourse that structures itself on the basis of differentiating between 'high' and 'low'. Under the monopoly of capitalism and the impact of the culture industry, the older distinction between high culture on the one hand, and low or mass culture on the other becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Postmodern architectural ideology is a manifestation of this unsettled and highly controversial issue. Judging from the examples at hand, high and mass culture are still far from a state of mutually beneficial state of coexistence.

It is paradoxical that while postmodernity attempts to instigate a state of cultural genesis, postmodern architecture is completely preoccupied with representing the aspects of decadence, in an otherwise complex cultural condition.

In *Architecture and Utopia*, Tafuri paints a hopeless picture of the destiny of architectural production under capitalism. Consequently, he defines the aim of the critical analysis of the basic principles of contemporary architectural ideology to be the "precise identification of those tasks which capitalist development has taken away from architecture."<sup>163</sup> In disagreement with his position, I propose that critical analysis be directed towards the identification of those tasks and constituents that the contemporary architectural ideology, postmodernism in this case, has given away. If in calling for a "postmodern" architecture, Venturi suggested that: "the iconography and mixed media of roadside commercial

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<sup>163</sup> M. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), .ix.

architecture will point the way,"<sup>164</sup> then I find it only logical-- in view of this critical exercise-- that in calling for a critique of postmodern architecture, we should start by looking for aspects of resistance to those very notions. The inherent autonomy of architecture will lead the way, "if we look."

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<sup>164</sup> Op.CIT., *Learning From Las Vegas*, p.131.

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